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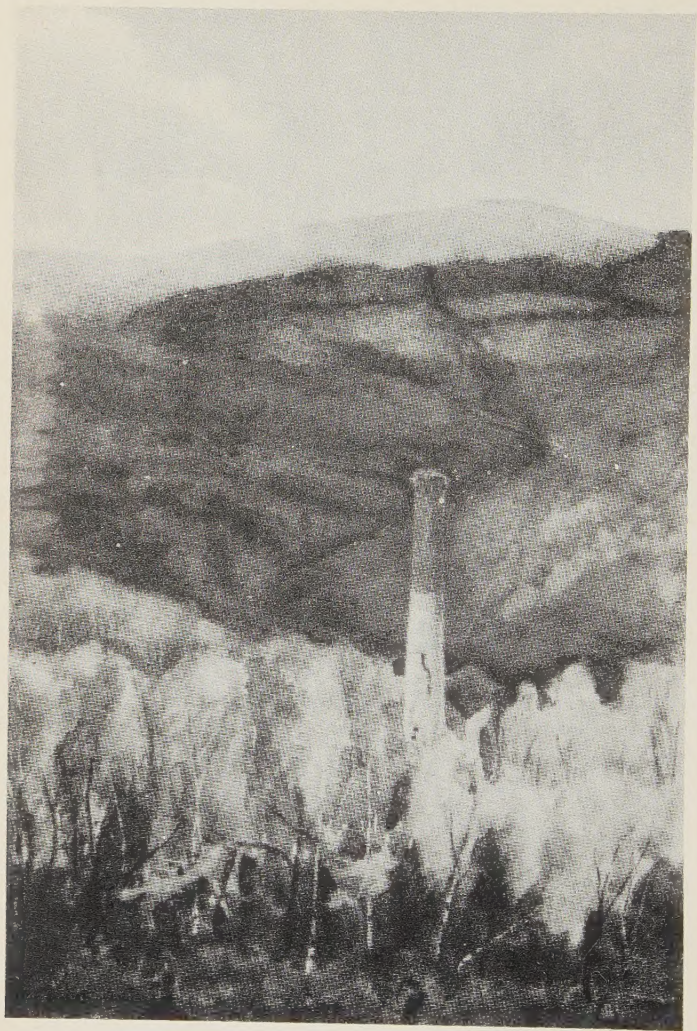


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THE FOREST ON THE HILL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LYING PROPHETS
CHILDREN OF THE MIST
SONS OF THE MORNING
THE STRIKING HOURS
THE RIVER
THE AMERICAN PRISONER
THE SECRET WOMAN
KNOCK AT A VENTURE
THE PORTREEVE
THE WHIRLWIND
THE FOLK AFIELD
THE MOTHER
THE VIRGIN IN JUDGMENT
THE THREE BROTHERS
FUN OF THE FAIR
THE HAVEN
THE THIEF OF VIRTUE
TALES OF THE TENEMENTS
DEMETER'S DAUGHTER
THE BEACON



THE FOREST ON THE HILL.

THE FOREST ON THE HILL

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY A. BENTHALL

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1912

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TO
COLONEL D. D. CUNNINGHAM, F.R.S.,
WITH SINCERE REGARD

BOOK I

THE FOREST ON THE HILL

CHAPTER I

WHERE certain high-climbing hills take leave of the lowlands, there spread, beneath the eastern frontiers of Dartmoor, extended ranges of forest; and amid these far-flung groves, lifted mightily upon the bosom of her proper mount, crested with the ragged wilderness and bound on north and south by little valleys, where streamlets draw a silver thread through the fringes of her robe, lies Yarner—a fair kingdom, peopled by many myriads of the unconscious.

Approached at the epact of a vanished year, and viewed from the naked hilltops before entering her precincts, she shone at early morning under hibernal colours brightly, and the low sun not only gilded the drab and iron-grey contours of her woods, but wakened also a warmth of rose and purple therein, where spread the growth of young birches in a straggling stain amid the more sober colours of adult trees. The physical proportions of Yarner were clearly manifested under these conditions; the great main mass bosomed upon one rounded hill in close-fitting garment of wintry ash and silver, warmed to russet and chilled to lead; then on the right hand and on the left the land fell nobly, descending into deep ravines, beyond which the earth climbed up again. The northern heights making abrupt ascent, threw off the last straggling arms of the birches and swept upward to the stark Moor; but where southern hills arose beyond the valley, there mingled pine and fir in dim green and blue that melted together under the day-spring. Descending then upon Yarner, after long declivities

of heath and fern, with sentinel spinneys standing like islands in a sere sea of the fallen brake, there appeared a broken hedge of earth and sprang a giant company of oaks, whose arms touched here, laced there, and so made a cincture of many boughs for the margin of the wood. The scene changed, and the light changed, as when one enters some great, shadowy building, to rest body and mind from the din and glare without.

The planes of the morning sunshine were broken up, barred and scattered by branch and trunk. Interspaces of darkness spread between the floods of light; and a level carpet of dead, dry leaves was wrought into one harmony of design and diapered and fretted with delicate blue shadow. Morning made music here, and above the prattle of animate life persisted an eternal murmuring of trees. For to them belongs a soul of melody, born dryad-like with their birth, destined to endure while their forest lyres shall stand for the harper of the ages to play upon. Their songs continue; their silences are but interval and pause between the great movements of an everlasting symphony; and the orchestra of the trees, with its melodies, now leaf-borne and lisping, now bough-borne and fierce; now throbbing through the deep diapason of summer; now furious, shrieking, lashed out by tempest from the naked ramage of tree-tops—ceases never.

Under the greater, leafless things shone hollies, and the masses of them, though aglint with fire and aglow with fruit, yet made mounds of darkness in the winter light of the woods. Through a cool radiance of visible air—the breath of sleeping earth—there threaded and filtered the genial glow of day, where sunshine broke on trunks and great ash coloured boles. Seen under the morning, behind the lace-work of the woods, the farther hillside flung itself across the east like a cloud of shining smoke—dark indeed by contrast with the sky above it, yet full of light, drenched in a haze of opal air, spacious and pure, decorated with the finials of the spruce and the larch, where they spired above a sapphire gloom that still haunted the depths of the valley beneath them.

Her immense slopes and sudden descents added sublimity

to Yarner. There lay, indeed, within her frontiers many a level acre, where the trees stood shoulder to shoulder, branch locked in branch ; but abrupt declivities scattered the forest regions and broke up their order, so that through the boughs of a great oak one might perceive the crown of his neighbour ; or, in precipitous places, the feet of some poised tree twining silver roots vainly upon air above the head of another more safely anchored below. At this season, in the lustrous, untinctured splendour of still mornings, the plan of the forest was spread in light upon the shining hills, and, seen against the sunshine, every tree and harmonious embrace of trees, every leaf-strewn glade, every heathery clearing, every pinnacle and arch and column, flashed nakedly. Here were they outlined with flame, where stood parent trunk and main edifice of limb ; here they were scrawled and splashed in with nought but quivering fire to the limits of the lesser branches and feathery twigs, as they leapt in a radiant network against the blue. The forest roofs thus caught pure splendour of sunlight and irradiated a white, ærial glitter that dazzled the eyes and made them content to seek the more genial, more gentle glow of earth.

Life manifested itself everywhere, and the diurnal creatures on wings and paws minded their business above and below. There was a subdued, perpetual noise, not of singing but of talking birds. No romance touched the multitudes—only the stir, bustle, chatter of every day. They followed the never-ceasing, necessary business of preserving life by hard work of beak and tooth and claw. Food, food, and more food was all the matter ; food, food, and more food, that each small body might keep well clothed with fur or feathers against the assault of the season. Some moved aloft in twittering companies and flocked and flew together ; some fed in the wet places by stream side ; some were busy among the dead leaves ; some ransacked the earth, or the bark of the rotting tree. Their food in every case meant the destruction of animate or inanimate life—either living organism or the promise of seed. There were acorns and beech mast for the pigeon, berries for the thrush and blackbird, invisible insects for

the snipe and woodcock in the marsh; grub and beetle for the great green woodpecker and nuthatch, where they explored branch and bough and sent moss and bark falling to earth from aloft. There were cones for the squirrel, humped red on the red pine bough; lesser life than his own for the raptorial bird hawking at wood-edge; for the jay, who screamed and flashed from one thicket to another; for the halcyon, perched like a jewel on the dead branch above stream. The folk made pattering and hopping, a rustle in the dry leaves below and a movement overhead; they sought their meat for the moment without knowledge or care of to-morrow, or the stern months to come, through which they must need more and find less as the supply diminished. They lived in lusty rivalry; they moved in their environment after the ordered plan and wist not whence or why or whither. Some were fearful of others and fled before them; some flourished side by side and made no quarrel. But war was the recognised state; all were fighting; none knew that it was so. The feeble met the powerful, and might was pitted against guile, or the single strength of the strong challenged the combined strength of the weak.

The spectacle as a whole transcended human values in every relation; it escaped all conscious measurements and evaded every sort of human standard. The thing in itself lay outside conception; its significance could nowhere and in no wise be estimated; it flouted all conclusions, and pessimist and optimist alike were destined to lose themselves in the labyrinth of it. Because of futilities there is none greater than that which would estimate unconscious life in the terms of consciousness, and give a human heart and brain to those heartless, brainless necessities of matter regulating life and death that we call 'laws.' Yet how impossible is it to escape from the anthropomorphic standpoint—for what is left? How can we appraise anything in other values than our own? How can we even formulate other values or find a lever-point of Archimedes outside our world of experience from which to operate?

Here in the forest 'good' and 'bad' meant less than

last night's dew. The crooked tree and the straight, the green tree and the dry, the dove and the falcon, the fox and the rabbit had their being neither above nor below 'good' and 'evil,' but merely in a category where they can never obtain. One might as easily formulate values for the rain cloud and the frost, the thunder and the lightning, as for them.

Even to speak of 'the thing in itself' is vain, since it lies beyond human power to arrive thereat. No two minds can ever bring the same mirror of seeing to this place; no two, therefore, can carry the same image away. The true image we know not. For us it must lurk only in the forest's relations to all other things, and amid those relations must we seek the truth if anywhere. No logical process, no formula will help us here; and he who looks at forest, or universe, through the eyes of his intellect finds only a riddle without an answer. Intellect, indeed, serves but to slough man in the pathetic fallacy; a forest beggars intellect at every turn, and those who would remotely comprehend it must enter through a far older and deeper psychologic channel.

The 'perpetual mythology' of words makes them at best an imperfect vehicle for pure reason, and language itself is a bar to that finality of statement science seeks; yet words remain great enough for the poet and seer whose utterance soars above exactitude. Even as Nature's self, they possess the power to flash different truths from different facets to different minds. It is by an ancient pathway, then, that we approach the forest, and through the deep, dark waters of being, through an accumulated inheritance of feeling and emotion, seek to unite therewith in understanding.

Feeling is the sole password here, and by fellow-feeling alone may a man come into sympathy with the observed phenomena. That is the master-key, if such exists; by that road one stretches hands to the unconscious, and perceives how thin is the partition separating the least from the greatest. Here are all our beginnings and sure foundations in the nest of the ant, the hive of the bee, the hoard of the prevenient squirrel, the holt, the dray, the den. Here are migration and incursion and war

unceasing, for the cause of that blind, frantic, irrational will to live, that actuates all unconscious existence. Out of it spring suspicion and fear, the gregarious instinct of the feeble folk and the segregation of the strong. But there are no names for these states in the forest; one cannot speak of 'social' and 'anti-social'; one cannot condemn the solitary hawk, or applaud the communion of the coneys. One can but perceive that weakness ever runs to weakness, that strength suffices itself. So did the neolithics herd; but their prophet or saga-singer dwelt in a hut apart, and might not be met as common man to man in the way. Here, moreover, as in the conscious world, there is a tendency giving victory to the herd. Might lies in numbers, and the finest things are fewest.

Thinkers are coming to deny this eternal struggle of adjustment, and to suspect the battle is more apparent than real; but no question obtains about that here. Life in the forest is a ceaseless fight, and the outcome of rigid selection that extends from the least insect to the mightiest tree. The tattered and the ill-shapen tell it; the broken and perishing tell it; the eyes of bird and beast tell it; the frost and lightning and storm tell it. We move through a mighty battlefield, yet know not what constitutes the fruit of victory, for life itself is only a casual condition of all this matter. There is perhaps more death than life in the forest. The acorn carries life to earth; its cup perishes; life makes a brave, beautiful show, yet seems little more than a long-drawn, panic terror after all—a rainbow on ambient darkness, a running away before death; and the aged oak, yielding up existence bough by bough, till vitality has retreated within the last hiding-place and fortress of trunk and root, is a symbol of all things.

But we set out with certain postulates based on common sense. These once passed without challenge, and the forest becomes an objective fact to be stated in many different terms. We may, for example, regard it as a cycle of cause and effect. One selects first a few more data from the innumerable data at disposal and perceives evidences of a new driving force and a superior activity not before apparent. From the mass of all that wills to live,

there emerges a being above the rest—one who wills not only to live, but also to enjoy living. The others exist, not knowing that they are alive; this one is conscious of that paramount fact, and so must needs probe all its possibilities.

Now irregular open spaces appeared in the woods, and among the trees there extended long, winding scratches whereon nothing was permitted to grow. The bald places lay like wales and wounds inflicted upon the forest by violence or disease. They were poisoned ground, whereon no life flourished; the inanimate creatures had deserted them; the animate hasted across them as quickly as they might. To the edges of these open sores the hearty timber and undergrowth crept and the ivy bounded them; then stretched the gash and gaped the blot—to show where collided conscious and unconscious, to mark where the last-born had conquered that older order of primeval forest, and cut his own way through the midst.

Natural, therefore, were these tracks and clearings—natural as the timber they destroyed; and Pan might be conceived as watching the arrival of mankind in the wood with absolute indifference. The scroll unrolls for ever; and while matter continues to be eternal, every form of it is ephemeral, so that the genesis of a new thing or the exodus of an old are alike events of transient consequence in themselves. They sound, indeed, the watchword; they proclaim that all is well with the law and that evolution proceeds upon its cosmic plan; busy alike with greater and lesser galaxies, forgetting neither the sand of the shore nor the drops of the ocean nor the grey brain pulp and matrix of conscious intelligence; but these passing forms are of no supreme account: the eternal principle alone is precious. And the law reigns universal; it forges every link; while for the length of the chain, that doubtless varies and depends, in the last resort, on duration of suns, since life is only the unweaned child of fire and water.

While, however, the clearing and the pathway hacked by man through the forest are of small importance to the wood-god; while only a dying dryad weeps her fallen oak; while there is begotten but an added interest and fearful

joy in Pan's forest court of fauns and fays, upon unconscious nature the coming of man falls otherwise. Fur and feathers retreat before him; no thing trusts him wholly, and the prosperity or affliction of beast or bird depend upon his attitude. Himself a predatory creature, he does evil in the sight of all other predatory creatures, and the children of the night, who might claim closest kindred with him, suffer most severely at his hand. Accident, indeed, sanctifies the fox and otter, since they minister to his happiness, and their hunting and their death give joy to him; but the hawk and jay, the jackdaw and raven, the stoat and weasel, destroy for their life what he destroys for his pleasure; their will to live challenges his will to enjoy; and therefore he exterminates them. For the like reason he fells the timber and modifies the architecture of the forest; he reorganises it and improves it on a human value; he plants certain trees and evergreen undergrowths and establishes certain beasts and birds; while others he banishes and deports as things undesirable or worse than useless. Under a different scale of values he cuts down the woods, turns them into gold and silver, or lays the forest bare and lifts human homes upon it. His purpose is always the same: that his will to enjoy may be furthered.

He is the king of the forest, and animate life long since learned that lesson, for generations of experience have stored within the intelligence of the greatest and least of his unconscious subjects a distrust profound. They retreat before him, and his coming is marked by hurtle of wings and hurry of feet. No triumphal entry is his; no welcome awaits him here; no wood-dove alights upon his shoulder; no green-eyed catamount purrs and rubs her spotted pelt about his knees. All wild creatures hurry out of sound and sight and scent of the king, because the hereditary spirit brooding in them links him with danger and points to him as another obstacle in the path of their will to live.

Finally, it may be said that we are not concerned with those who possess the forest. Yarner herself and her living dependencies are all the matter.

CHAPTER II

THERE came a new under-keeper to Yarner, and he brought with him his mother. Their home lay beneath the woods, in a valley where a stream was caught and spread into a stew-pond. Round about rolled the forest every way, and the man and his mother were much sequestered. He had done similar work for fifteen years, and left a former master, not for any fault, but because of refusal to oblige him in a matter where the servant stood at liberty to choose.

Timothy Snow was a contemplative soul, with a measure of intellect that would have taken most men to cities. But in his case it was allied with an anti-social instinct and a love of loneliness. His character prospered best under the sky; he believed that Nature spoke the last word on every subject in the ear tuned to listen; he found anodyne for all trouble among the community of the trees, and answer to all questions within the purlieus of them. Nature, so far as he had marched along with her, was always right and to be trusted. Her practice appealed to him as uniformly just, and he honestly believed that in no possible crisis of human affairs would she be found to fail. His uneventful life had led him to these conclusions, and the accidents of his secluded calling and personal instincts had combined to hoodwink him as to the truths of existence. He was very well satisfied with his opinions, and believed (as the anchorite before him for another reason) that a man can only live at peace with a clean soul by seeking solitude and eschewing, as much as may be, the company of the herd. That the herd's welfare is demanded of the individual: that the

greatest sacrifice is required from the best endowed he knew not. His mistake was to find in the law of Nature a rule of conduct and a criterion of right. He judged her on a scale of human values, approved her methods and built a code founded in confusion of principles. At thirty-five Timothy Snow considered his opinions entirely satisfactory, and as yet no problem of life had arisen to break them down. He scorned dogma and control. Justice was his motto, and since mercy belonged not to Nature's red rubric in any sentimental sense, he held mercy a danger, and could point to a thousand human instances of its failure. Mercy, indeed, miscarries oftener than justice—and that he knew; and if he hated anything it was mercy, and if he resented anything it was pity.

Of a nervous temperament, yet strong in his own conceit, stiff-necked and selfish, he had reached the age of thirty-five. And now the theatre of his work was changed, and the accident responsible for the change had set him thinking.

Here, in Yarner, was the loneliness he desired and the air he chose to breathe; but life had created a complexity, and of the few relatives that belonged to him the one responsible for this change required to be considered.

When it became necessary for the man to leave his former work, his mother had bethought her of her dead husband's brother—one Lot Snow, who dwelt in the little village of Ilsington, beneath Dartmoor's southern frontier; and this man—not unfriendly to his kindred and long desirous of their better acquaintance—was able to do the hoped-for thing and find his nephew very excellent work of the sort that he desired. From his good offices there had arisen some obligation, but Timothy was reasonable and did not resent that. He knew how to take gifts in a proper spirit, and he felt gratitude to his uncle; yet, while alive to the favour, he played no servile part, and did not feel that his own liberty of action and judgment were involved. Of Lot Snow he knew little as yet, nor guessed at certain plans in his

uncle's head. For himself Timothy merely proposed to live as he had lived, avoid further obligations, and, while recognising his elder's right to special consideration, allow no sentiment to trouble him and no influence to modify his own rules of seclusion. That the other might make demands upon him or harbour designs calculated to upset all his own ideas of a seemly and comfortable life, the young man guessed not. He prided himself on his strength and reticence before mankind; he did not fear to rub shoulders with them, or shirk the loss or gain resulting from that attrition; but he felt now that while it might be necessary to see his uncle and his uncle's friends, they must keep in their proper places, and not be suffered to complicate or modify his own rule.

There was some fine grain in this man's character. Not for nothing did he confound Nature's processes with right and wrong, and if the balance of his judgment erred and promised ultimate confusion, there were points where it stood for strength. A life may run upon that road and come very safely to its goal and terminus; but circumstances alone can decide, and one must be little better than company for hermits, hermit-crabs, and solitary apes to find the life and rule of the wilderness suffice him. Naturally there were many possibilities hidden in the keeper at which he guessed not. Nothing could have made him a hero or a scoundrel, but a latent germ or two awaited only the quickening spring of opportunity to surprise him in their fruition.

We find Timothy Snow, then, with his foot far advanced on the threshold of adult manhood; his mind stored dangerously with opinions to the detriment of ideas, his experience small, his nature distinguished. He had come to ripe age untried, for a recent ordeal, that would certainly have offered temptations enough to some men, was no trial to him. The very proposal he resented as an outrage. It awoke him to anger as a threat against liberty, and a gross proposal that should have been impossible from the rich to the poor. The experience had made him self-conscious and awakened class prejudice.

In person Snow stood five feet ten, and was of solid

build. From a massive neck rose his head, and the features were large and regular. There was something cold about his expression, and his voice chimed with it; his dark grey eyes were illuminated with intelligence; his skin was brown; his eyebrows heavy; and between them were ruled two parallel lines striking at right angles upon others that crossed the summit of the nose. His face was not animated, and a large black moustache did not conceal the nervous mouth. He wore his hair very short, and so close to his head that it revealed the contours of the skull. An instinct rare in his class made him particular concerning his body. He kept it very clean, and hated foul air and foul clothes.

His mother was a woman of sixty, and other children she had none. She bore herself in a reserved, undemonstrative manner, and the home they inhabited together seemed silent and cold to those of more genial nature. But they understood each other very well. The woman was a Christian, and, to oblige her, Timothy went weekly to church. She knew the reason of his going, and was grateful. That he did not think as she did she also knew; yet the fact troubled her little. He was an honest man and a plain dealer, as his father had been before him, and the mother felt no concern for her son. Neither did she regret his reserve and habitual silence. She kept his house and knew herself vital to his comfort. She was not a woman of any imagination, and her nature left her content with things as they were.

Mother and son were satisfied with each other, and felt little need for much speech or ready exchange of opinions that had been natural in the circumstances. Silent were their hours together; and even when Timothy left his home by night, to guard the game and face possible dangers, his mother showed no solicitation, for she knew right well that such a display would have been resented. He preached Nature to her, and she listened patiently, but argued sometimes against him from the standpoint of her own faith. Sarah Snow was a big, grey woman who went slowly, breathed stertorously, and minded her own business and her boy's. In her

heart she hoped much from the change of fortune ; because Lot Snow, her son's uncle, was a prosperous and childless bachelor, and she suspected that the nature of Timothy would please and satisfy this man. She saw, however, dangers ; but, none the less, she believed that her son would come presently to recognise the gulf that yawns between abstract rectitude and practical conduct. That he would find a way to bridge this gulf without tribulation or temporal loss she also trusted.

CHAPTER III

TIMOTHY SNOW went through a grey gloaming in mid-December, where Yarner fell and climbed again to the eastern wood and a little river ran through the valley. On one side swept down oak and beech, all wan and subdued, while darker still on the other ascended thick groves of fir. Beside them, upon the hill, thrust up the ruined shaft and shattered buildings of a deserted copper mine.

The stream in the bottom ran shouting and flashing very white through the dusky evening hour. It broke the hush and silence, and wound amid the woods under a wreath of many ferns. *Osmunda royal* crowned the lesser things, but the great fronds of it had turned to a pale golden tint. While yet the lady fern, the spleenworts and the hart's-tongue were green and showed small trace of death, the king fern had passed, and, like great dim lamps, stood beside the stream and shone with lemon light through the deepening darkness of the underwood.

There was a gate here, fastened with a piece of barbed wire, and at this barrier appeared a girl. To have climbed the obstacle would have been an easy matter for the lithe, strong creature, but her purpose was different. She loitered and listened. Then she saw Snow approaching, and began to shake the gate.

"Would you be so kind as to ope this for me?" she said as he arrived; but his answer was short.

"I made it fast once for all and can't open it no more."

"Oh dear!" she cried, and pretended much concern.

"What are you doing here, any way?"

"I was going across the wood to see a friend of mine who lives beyond."

They stood on either side of the gate, and he looked at the speaker. She was very fair, and of a type that arrested man. She regarded him in glimmering side glances; her large lips moved—now tightened, now relaxed. They were never passive, and ever pouted in doubt, or opened to laugh; but they were of a beautiful shape and colour. Her grey eyes shone in the gloaming, and every line of her was challenging. Her hips seduced and spoke a language; her neat, prominent breasts were provocative. She was tall, and stood now with her arms crossed on the gate and one foot raised to rest on the lowest bar. She wore a straw hat, a piece of brown fur round her neck, and a dress of plum colour. The fur made a sharp contrast with her own pale locks.

"There's no right of way here, though everybody appears to think so," said Timothy. He carried a gun over his left shoulder, and his right hand was in the pocket of his velveteen jacket.

"The last keeper—Mr Redstone—didn't make no fuss."

"No; that's why he lost his billet. I've got to undo a lot that man did, and the first thing is to let people know Yarner's a private wood. And Kingdon, the head-keeper, wills it so."

She was studying his face closely, while apparently looking in every other direction. She smiled deliciously and her teeth flashed.

"Well, you won't turn me back this time, Mr Snow, will you? I come from Ilsington, and 'twill take me a month of Sundays to tramp back and go round by the Moor road."

"You can pass, then: but understand, there's to be no more of it. And please tell your friends that there'll be trouble for people here if there's any more trespassing."

"Oh my!" she said, "that's a poor look-out. You're going to be as sharp as your old uncle."

"What do you know about my uncle?" he asked, but not as one interested.

"More than you do, seemingly. He's clever and rich and hard. My father's a friend of his."

"And who might you be, then?"

"Oh, I'm of no account," she answered.

"I didn't suppose you was; but you've got a name?"

She gasped. Her interest tightened. But she did not answer his question.

"Yes, Lot Snow is the hard sort, and will have his own way, willy nilly. I daresay you know that much about him?"

"Minds his own business, I reckon."

"Yes—minds it well. He got you this job, didn't he?"

Timothy considered. He hated gossip and chatter. While he reflected, the girl spoke again.

"Yes, I know he did. But he's not the sort to do anything for nothing. You're beholden to him, and you'll find that out."

The man stared at her.

"What idle chatterbox are you?" he said.

"Not a chatterbox at all, only a kind-hearted girl. But I won't waste no more of your time, and I won't come again."

"No, I shouldn't."

"You're like old Lot—haven't got no use for women, seemingly. 'Tis his rude boast that he's never wanted 'em since he was weaned."

"I don't blame him."

"No; but maybe you will presently. He never married, but would it surprise you very much to know that he's wishful for you to wed?"

Timothy made a gesture of surprise combined with anger. He never swore, but an occasional fierce expiration of air through his nostrils stood with him for an expletive.

"What next, I wonder!"

She enjoyed the sound of his impatient snort, it gave her a little thrill of pleasure.

"Why, next, no doubt, he'll tell you about it. Don't think I'm in his secrets. I wouldn't like to be, for that matter, because he's said to do some rather horrid deeds sometimes. But my father knows him very well."

"I'm hearing things! And why is all this to be?"

"For land. You'll come into your uncle's fortune, no doubt, if you behave to please him. There's land joins

his, and his hope and prayer is that a ring fence should go round two properties some day. And he thinks 'twill be an easy matter, for you've only got to wed a certain, harmless woman."

Snow snorted again.

"Did he send you to break this to me?"

"Good Lord, no! He'd be properly savage, I reckon, if he thought I'd mentioned it, or if he even knew I knew it. 'Tis a mighty fine secret, no doubt, as he'll break to you some day when he thinks the time has come."

"He don't know me yet."

"And you don't know him."

The man stood silent for some moments and reflected on his recent past. It seemed as though it were to be echoed again and repeated in the immediate future. He felt troubled, annoyed, even outraged, that his affairs should be in the knowledge of a strange and flippant girl. That somebody, who was unknown to him until this moment, should reveal these startling plans, caused him active indignation. He forgot the woman responsible for his experience, and strode off suddenly without more words.

"Hold on!" she cried. "Where's your manners? What about this gate?"

"Climb over," he answered, without looking back. "You're spry and limber—a chit like you. And mind you don't come here no more."

"Well, I never! That's a poor return for all I've told you."

"I never asked you to tell me; and 'tis all rubbish and nonsense, anyway."

Their voices grew louder as the distance between them increased.

"You wait and see, and then you'll be sorry for being so rude."

To this he did not answer, and the sound of his feet soon died as he descended the coomb towards his home.

First the girl laughed to herself, and then she grew sober and thoughtful. She rested her cheeks on her hands at the top of the gate and considered the man carefully.

Presently she moved, but made no effort to climb the

gate. Instead, she retraced her steps and mounted by the footpath she had descended.

She came from Ilsington, and in a lane nigh her native village a man met her. He was loafing there, and evidently expected her.

"Hast seen him?" he asked.

"Yes."

They walked side by side silently, and the man waited for his companion to speak. He was tall and of a well-drilled carriage—a policeman, for the moment off duty. Frederick Moyle had a fair face, an immense flaxen moustache, and pale blue eyes. He had the light eyebrows and eyelashes that usually indicate a sly man. He was six-and-twenty, and of a cunning, cowardly disposition. Under an imposing physique he hid craft, but no courage. He loved the girl who now walked beside him, but he feared that his love was a hopeless matter. She also knew it, though she liked Mr Moyle, as she liked all personable men; but she did not like him well enough to dismiss him and free his wounded heart of her friendship. He was useful and amusing, so she let him hang on.

"Well, Audrey, what about the chap?"

"He's a terror."

"So I've heard. Can't give a civil answer."

"I shook him up, though. When he's angry, he doesn't swear: he snorts like a bull. He's an excitable man. He'd be an ugly chap to quarrel with, I daresay."

"As ugly as he is to look at?"

"No, he's not ugly, Fred—you can't say that."

"I call him ugly. I hate they black men."

"Because you're fair as a white mouse yourself."

"You set him dancing after you, of course?"

She laughed.

"Oh dear no. He hadn't got no use for me. Warned me out of the woods! And when I hinted that old Lot Snow had ideas for him, he sniffed properly. 'Doesn't know me yet,' he said. 'Twill be a lot of fun to watch what happens between uncle and nephew. He's a masterful man—rather my sort, I believe.'"

The other pulled at his famous moustache.

"You'll be just a counter in the game, no doubt."

"Shall I? Not much! I play my own games. You ought to know that. If it amuses me to make the chap love me, I'll make him. I've got to see him by daylight first."

"He wasn't bowled over exactly, then?"

"No, he wasn't. I asked him to ope the gate for me, and he told me to climb over. That's good for a start. Not like you, and another here and there, who run if I whistle. You couldn't whistle that man."

"You'll get round him, of course, if you want to. But will you want to? He's a glum, silent creature, and he'd be jealous as the devil if he did fancy you; and where would you be then?"

She considered this.

"A jealous husband wouldn't be much use to me, I grant. I'm going on living—even after I'm married. You won't catch me just behaving like a sheep for any man. I'd soon have enough of childer, too. There's better fun in the world than bringing childer into it. You can see that easy enough, if you've got eyes."

"Right! How we do think alike!"

"You say so, but 'tis all pretence in you. You're the same as other men at heart, and if you was married, you'd go on having a barrow-load and say 'twas the work of the Lord to bring 'em, and the business of the parish to look after 'em. Selfish devils you are—all of you—cunning as snakes. But no man shall ever knock my fine body to pieces. I didn't go to a proper school for nothing."

He sighed admiringly.

"You're a wonder! Oh, my stars, if you was to take me, what a fine time you'd have! But a sour, cranky man! 'Tis madness. You never would bide along with him a year."

"There's two simple things waiting for me to do in the world," she answered, "and one is to have as good a time as ever I can have in it, and t'other is to please father. I don't know that I shall be able to do both, but I hope 'twill be possible. He's been a very good father to me, and I'm his only child, and I shall have all he's got some

day. But life's life, and I'm not going to marry but to please myself."

He sighed.

"Well, you know you've got a friend till death in me," he said.

"That's all right. And now you'd better clear out; I'm going home this way."

They had reached a white gate from which ran a road through meadows. A quarter of a mile away glimmered lights on the threshold of a little wood. It was Middlecot Farm, Audrey Leaman's home. She prepared to leave the policeman, and he reminded her that she had promised to go for a walk with him on the following Sunday afternoon.

"I'll think about it," she said. "They'll say we're keeping company next. And if I hear anything of that, 'tis good-bye to you very quick, and you know it."

Mr Moyle sank gloomily down the hill to the village; the girl proceeded homeward. She whistled when a hundred yards from the house, and a Great Dane leapt out to meet her. The hound exhibited violent joy at her arrival, rose up, put his paws upon her shoulders, and licked her face. It was a fiction with Audrey that 'Battle' understood and shared her secrets.

She talked to him now, and made it clear that the brute stood in her eyes on much the same plane as policeman Moyle.

CHAPTER IV

THE hamlet of Ilsington,¹ famous for ever and famous only as the birthplace of that mighty Elizabethan decadent, John Ford, lies, a straggling litter of cottages, amid the southern foothills of Dartmoor. In the midst, springing up above its neighbour roofs of thatch and slate, rises a church tower, and houses press to the confines of the burying ground.

Beside the entrance, so near, indeed, that it supported one side of the lichgate, stood the home of Lot Snow. It faced the highway, and to the rear the graves crowded so closely that from one low window a man might thrust out his hand and touch a tomb. Here were the generations of the Snows buried, and there was a saying in Ilsington that the clan all stood within a step of their graves. The house was thatched, and the low eaves projected above the upper windows. Ivy mantled it; a few cottage flowers grew before the door; the granite lintels and posts of the gate were whitewashed that they might be seen on dark nights.

Lot Snow and his sister dwelt here. Neither had married, and she kept house for him, and, despite her years, preserved physical energy. She was seventy—a grey, bent woman, sane and silent. Her little sleeping chamber looked out upon the graves, and she was wont to say that her mother and father, whose dust reposed not twenty feet from her own sleeping-place, kept watch upon her.

Lot was ten years younger than Sibella Snow, and more

¹ To the antiquary, the 'poppy-headed' bench-ends in St Michael's Church might also constitute fame, since this outline of oak carving from the fifteenth century is almost unique in the west country, though common elsewhere.

active in mind than body. He had attained to great bulk, and exercise was irksome to him, but he allowed no physical disability to handicap him in pursuit of his ends. He was rich, and had many irons in the fire. Land hunger belonged to his nature as the ruling passion of it, and grew by what it fed on. The face that surmounted his great body was peculiar, for characteristics clashed there. A pendulous jowl and rather bestial mouth subtended bright black eyes—keen and hard. Above them the eyebrows had coarsened with age, and were now rough and full of long straggling hairs. They worked loosely, and could crowd down upon his eyes or lift into the middle of his forehead. While Audrey Leaman, the girl in whom Mr Snow's interest was at present so largely centred, had cultivated woman's supreme weapon, the smile, till it touched the indifferent and dazzled the susceptible male, Lot Snow had brought the frown to its most tremendous development, and could assume a ferocity of feature that made children cry and men silent to look upon him. The expression was often false, and reflected no just image of his mind; but those who saw it were not physiognomists and read it literally. They missed the furtive eye and trembling lower lip that spoilt the illusion. Lot found that to assume wrath was better than to feel it; therefore, behind a mask, which alarmed or angered others, he kept cool with advantage to himself. A large, white, clean-shaved face he had; a sharp nose was stuck in the midst of it, and on the great upheaving forehead above, his eyebrows wandered like two black clouds. His voice was thick and his throat chronically charged with mucous, so that he usually coughed and hawked before speaking. The character of the man was concealed by his flesh. One expected this ursine shape to hide a disposition that matched it, but the truth of him happened otherwise. He was a man of energetic and swift mind; he loved money, and worked hard for it; he coveted power, and clung to it when acquired.

His main estate adjoined that of his neighbour, Willes Leaman of Middlecot, and these men, of like ambitions and desires, had long sought for means by which their

properties might presently merge and be stablished on sure foundations, to endure when their time was past. They were human and reasonable; they indulged in no preliminary triumph before the promised fruition of their schemes; but circumstances at last combined to realise their ambitions, for Lot Snow, by dint of some labour, had won for his nephew a very admirable position within a stone's throw of himself. It was not his first attempt to do so; twice he had endeavoured to attract Timothy Snow nearer, but the younger man declined previous proposals. Then he found himself without work, accepted Lot's good offices, and was now established at Yarner under a new master who already recognised his value.

There came a Sunday when Timothy and his mother went to Ilsington to eat their dinner with their relatives. After the meal, Lot proposed to sound his nephew as to the future and reveal a little of his own plans. He feared no hindrance, for the thing he proposed was of a nature to rejoice any young man.

During dinner Lot rated his nephew.

"Jimmery! You'll suit Aunt Sibella here better than you'll suit me, my boy. She's the dumbest creature I ever met, and, being a silent woman, might go for a show; but she's old, and 'tis life that have struck her dumb; you're different, and I'd like to learn how is it your tongue works so stiff?"

"He never was a talker," said Tim's mother. "I had my fears when he was a little wee lad that he'd be tonguetied. Took a terrible long time coming to speech. 'Twas the same at school. 'Never wastes a word, that boy,' his master used to say of him."

Old Sibella nodded.

"'Tis to his credit, I'm sure. There's too much chattering in the rising generation. How they talk and prattle—like noisy water, all about nothing! There's Lot's adopted child, as I call her, that beautiful flaxen thing, Willes Leaman's daughter. 'Tis like a musical box to hear her running on—such a prate-apace as she is."

"Don't you say nothing against Audrey, my old dear,

because, well, you know, I won't have it," answered her brother. "A fine, sensible creature. 'Twas never known that such wit and good looks went together in a female afore."

"You'll make my son jealous, Lot," said Sarah Snow.

"Not I! The race be to the young nowadays. They feel no fear of us. They ban't frightened of our brains no more. They just go their headlong, silly way—like colts or calves. 'Tis the same all round—a spendthrift race. We toil for them to spend and enjoy, and they pat us on the back and say, 'Well done, old uns! you go on working and slaving and sweating—that's all you be fit for. You pile the money and get underground out of the way, and then we'll come along and scatter it and have the money's worth!' They don't think we know the use of cash. We'm only good to grub it. 'Tis the spirit of the age. Childer look upon their fathers as money-bags nowadays; and all they care is to slit the bag so soon as possible and sneak a bit of the stuff inside."

"You're too hard on the young," said Timothy's mother. "If you'd married and got a few boys and girls of your own, you'd have thought different."

"If God don't send sons, the devil sends nephews," answered Mr Snow. "Besides, Sarah, you very well know that you're the only woman ever I'd have wed. But you must needs like my brother, Timothy, better. Well, I don't blame you for that. He was a very fine chap, though he hadn't such good intellects as me."

"Not for making money; but he was a great reader and thinker. He was cleverer than you, Lot."

"Cleverness is what cleverness does. I haven't overmuch regard for they wonderful men who be always going to set the sieve afire, but never do. We see a mighty gert acorn and say what a terrible fine oak tree 'twould make; but it don't get planted, and it don't start, and it don't even get ate by an honest pig, so 'tis useless and unavailing and rots for all its promise. Now this here chap and his gamekeeping—I mean you, Timothy—well, gamekeeping's all very well, but my only nephew have a right to think of a higher walk in life presently, and when I got

Sir Percy Champernowne to let you have young Redstone's vacant job, I didn't mean that you was to stop in it for evermore."

"I'm very well content. I know the work and can do it."

"Of course — else you wouldn't be there. But you've got your ambitions, I suppose? We Snows are a pushing race. You don't want to be rearing birds for another man to shoot, all your life, do you? Why, certainly you do not. You must look forward, and I be going to show you which way to look."

The younger man put down his knife and fork and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief. Then he spoke deliberately.

"You don't understand me, Uncle Lot—not yet. I'm the sort as must run my own way and carry out my own life. I've thought a good bit about things, and I'm very well content to do the work I'm called to do. It suits me. It's silent and lonely; and I'm silent and lonely by nature, and I like it best so. You've got me just the billet I wanted, and much I thank you for it; but don't you be busy no more on my account. I'm not hungry for money, else I wouldn't have been a gamekeeper. Little is enough for my needs and my mother's. The thing is to be free all round in this world, and only the poor can be that. I wouldn't change with you for anything. Life's the only stuff I'm greedy for. I want to have life, and lots of it; but I don't want money, nor lands, nor nothing like that. Don't think me uncivil."

Lot laughed.

"You'm so green as Yarner will be next spring," he said; "the woods have kept your wits young and unripe. 'Tis time you came out of 'em—to polish your brains among the people. They'll teach you more than the trees and birds."

"I've got my ideas of how I want to spend my life. Work's the thing. I know what it means to earn money, and I'm like you there: I'd sooner earn than spend."

"Well said—so far as you go, Tim. There's more fun to be got out of earning than spending, if you're built like

me; and if you feel the same, there's hope for you. But when you say you know what it is to earn money, you speak outside truth, my lad, owing to your narrow view of things and youthful nature. No, you know what it is to earn your living—that's all; and that ban't the same as earning money. That's the lowest branch of the subject, and the stone-breaker and hedge-tacker do that. But their end is the same, and so soon as they can earn their living no longer, to the workhouse they go. You must look into the higher branches and make money and save it—like me. And you won't do that breeding another man's game-birds, or mooning about in Yarner with a gun over your shoulder."

"You can't understand yet how small my needs are, uncle."

"Stuff and nonsense! Small needs, small mind. You must get bigger ideas; and you might do worse than come to me for 'em."

Timothy felt anger move in him, but he showed no spark of it; instead he kept silence. To hear this material old man scorn his view of life and bid him put away childish things was gall. He felt himself super or to his uncle in every possible relation of thought and activity. He scorned the elder's base ideals; he hated the stuffy atmosphere of his thought. And what he hated still more was the fact that Lot Snow would never be able to realise, or admire, or credit his own lofty opinions. He—Timothy—so high in his own esteem—would never be able to make this fat, common creature understand how fine and distinguished he was. The hopelessness of the possibility struck him now and made him more silent than usual.

Presently he was left alone with Lot Snow. Sibella and her sister-in-law went to the parlour, while the men stopped and smoked in the kitchen, where their meal had been taken.

"What were your ideas for my future, if I may ask?" enquired the younger presently.

"My ideas *are*; they don't belong to the past. You've got brains, and a man need never despair of his son, or his brother's son, if there's brains to work on. My idea is this,

young chap, that presently, when you can leave Yarner decently—say in a year's time—you drop gamekeeping and take to farming. That's how I began, and look where I've got to. Farming don't mean ruination yet—not if you manure with brains; and to walk the open's better than to prowl a wood, when all's said. A farm it shall be—one of mine very like. In fact, I could put my hand on the place. Not mine quite yet, but very near as good. 'Twill mean fore-closure and a smack in the face for an old enemy—one of they little enjoyments of life that only cash brings along with it. Yes, you turn farmer; and then you wed—the right one. And, come presently, all mine's yours! There—that's the fine luck you've tumbled into, Timothy Snow—and you don't deserve a penn'orth of it!"

"I can't let no man plan out my life for me like that, Uncle Lot."

"Can't you? D'you know a better plan?"

"A plan that would suit me better, I do know."

The dark eyebrows descended a little.

"You'll make me draw back what I said about brains presently. You talk to your mother. She understands what I mean. And as for you—you look round and consider real life and the scant promise of it. And find out what a plague it is to be weak; and what a boon it is to be strong."

"The woods teach me that."

"Take the lesson to heart, then. Be one of the strong ones and stand alone——"

The other caught him up.

"That's it—that's what I do mean! To stand alone. Is it to stand alone to do your bidding and take a wife of your choice for the promise of your cash? Don't you see that, with my ideas, it wouldn't pay me? Would you have done it when you was young?"

"That I would! But no such chance ever came my way. No man wanted to pour his money into my lap and make my weakness into strength. Single-handed, I done it all. And, though not one successful man in a thousand can say he owes success to himself alone, I can—in sober truth. Alone I did it all; but not for choice. If I'd

started where you'll start, I'd have gone a mighty deal further than ever you'll go. We'll leave that now. You try to think what it must be to have a clear five hundred pound of money coming in every half-year—without turning your hand over for it. If you can once understand the meaning of that, it is any odds but you'll like to hear more about my opinions and ideas."

"You never married."

"True, but that's neither here nor there. A wise man marries something else besides a woman. I could have married a score of 'em, but there was nothing to 'em. The two women I offered for in the course of my life both had plenty along with them—plenty."

"But they didn't want you?"

"Exactly—I hadn't enough to offer—not then. Now, no doubt, there's many would like to join forces, but I'm past 'em now."

"You want me to marry a certain woman?"

"I do—I mean you to."

"'Twas for refusing to do that I left my last place."

"'Tis a very different case—you can't compare 'em, and you know you can't."

"It aims at a man's liberty and makes him a slave. It's indecent to think of. It can't happen nowadays."

"Wait and see, and keep your temper and don't call no names. Now we'll go into the parlour, for there's more sense in your mother's little finger than in your whole head, nephew Timothy. You come and talk to me so often as you're able and I'll enlarge your mind. And if time offers I'll ride in your wood now and then and hear your wood-larning some day. And then I'll show you that the wisdom of squirrels be less than the sense of Lot Snow, and that 'tis better to marry a lovely woman and keep your bed of a night than walk a wet wood to offer a target to poachers or rheumatics. Let your work be by day—that's the time for honest men to make their money. To prowls by night—what is it? A policeman's job, and no better. Never was a Snow a policeman, I believe."

Profoundly dissatisfied the young man left Ilsington presently and walked home with his mother. She was

happy in the company of Sibella Snow, for they had a common outlook on life.

And when they were gone, Lot Snow went to see Willes Leaman at Middlecot, that he might tell him of the talk with Timothy.

The farmer was younger than his friend—a handsome man in the prime of life. He was fair, and of a hard disposition and grasping nature. He regarded his daughter as a savage might have regarded a woman-child. She represented something to barter—a commodity worth sheep and cattle. He yielded only to Lot in affairs, and was somewhat under the dominion of a personality stronger and subtler than his own.

Now he came to the door in his shirt-sleeves and welcomed Mr Snow.

"Come in, master. The maiden's out with her mother, so we've got it to ourselves. Lord! how you'm sweating, though 'tis such a cold day."

They sat presently with a bottle of sloe gin between them and smoked and talked.

"Well, and what do you make of him?"

"He's all right—a strong man and stiff-necked. I'd rather deal with that sort than with the young fellows that be punched out of putty. You can mould them in your own shape, but there's no nature in 'em to *keep* your shape. You can't bake 'em. This chap has character; but he'll want handling, and he's worth handling."

"Young and inexperienced."

"He is. A wild man of the woods, you might say. Pity as I didn't catch him earlier, for he'll take taming. But have no fear. He'll pay for taming—and that's more n you can say of most of the rising generation."

"No use for women, seemingly."

"How d'you know that?"

"Audrey scraped acquaintance with him down-along, and he ordered her out of the woods and wouldn't ope a gate for her."

Lot laughed.

"Stung her, I warrant!"

"No—just interested her. Couldn't have fallen out

better. 'Twould be worth a good bit to have 'em tokened. It might steady my wench down. Giddy as a butterfly, and no sense of her worth. I'm afraid of my life she'll go and spoil her own market."

"He'll put the drag on her very quick if he gets to care for her."

"That's the rub. You can bring a man to a woman, but you can't make him marry her."

"Oh yes, you can," declared Mr Snow. "That's not beyond my powers, I judge. But there's a deal to be done first. We must till the ground and lay in a crop. Would you believe it, now, he's that natural that he don't care a brass farden for money!"

"Not care for money!"

"Flouts it—like a lot as haven't got none. 'Tis only the poor turn up their noses at cash: I never knew a man as had money even pretend to scorn it. But we'll whet the lad's appetite come presently. 'Tis a taste that grows mighty quick by what it feeds on."

"Money can do all things that matter, in my opinion."

"It can; but don't you utter your opinion. Wiser not. Timothy's got savage ideas picked up out of the game preserves. A lot of silliness he aired afore me; but 'twas a rare sort of silliness—not the common chatter of the fools. Puts me in mind of his foolish, lazy, dead father. But he's not foolish at bottom, and he's not lazy. We must temper the man, for there's stuff in him that will stand tempering."

"Teach him that money can do all things that matter," repeated Willes Leaman.

"I'll let him find that out for himself," answered the other. "We'll bring about a meeting soon, and you and your wife and maiden shall feed along with me; and he and his mother shall be there."

"What's she like? Can you make use of her?"

"Maybe. Sarah Snow's a very sensible sort of creature, but she don't influence him much save in small things. He goes to church of a Sunday to please her."

"Goes to church, does he? I'd better tell my girl that. 'Twould serve to send her."

"She ought to go, whether or not. You ought to send her; and you ought to go yourself."

Leaman shrugged his shoulders.

"The people would know 'twas humbug if I went."

"What matter? Ban't they all there for the same reason? It makes weekdays easier and pleases the gentlefolk. They cry off themselves, but they like to think we go. 'Tis a sign, in their opinion, that we be on the side of Church and State—where they would have us be. It makes 'em feel safer, and then, when we come to have dealings with 'em, we reap the advantage. Ha! ha! There's no sort of man easier to fool than a gentleman! D'you know that, Willes? The real, blue-blooded sort—full of high ideas and lofty notions, and weighted with their obligations to the common people—why, they're as easy to hoodwink as an ostrich with his head in a sand-heap. I like the real thing when I meet it. But you can't get round all the new-made rich same as you can the real gentlefolk. They be made of our own coarse clay and they fight with our own weapons. They trust none and believe in none. That's how they've made 'emselves into 'gentlemen'; but they'm no more the real thing than a toadstool's a mushroom. The real thing be very near gone. There ain't no room for it in the world nowadays."

"I hate 'em—real or shoddy," said Willes Leaman.

They talked politics for awhile, and revealed a very thorough suspicion of all men in power. They judged others by themselves, and appeared to doubt the possibility of an action disinterested, or a motive pure.

CHAPTER V

THERE had fallen a great snow, and all the earth was white. Now, instead of the customary pelt of sad colours close woven, spread forth upon its hills and valleys, the forest appeared as a thin and tattered veil drawn raggedly over the white ground beneath. Once more reality shattered appearance, and the thing, so dense and solid yesterday, to-day was marked by its true tenuity and nakedness. It had seemed to conceal the ground from which it sprang; but the earth was now whitened into stark visibility, and upon it the forest spread—a mere, purple, transparent stain. Only fir-trees, bending under hummocks of snow, stood solidly forth from the gauze of the shivering woods.

From north to south there lumbered heavy cloud-banks along the horizon, and the wind that drove them struck bitterly upon all flesh. The upper sky was clear, while earth still lay in deep shadow, over which mist wreaths curled and crawled with long white fingers, and all the lower world of woods and valleys was hidden beneath layers of flat, far-spreading cloud. But across the top of these vaporous seas rolled ripples of pure gold where the sun broke in upon them and set their crests aflame. The cloud-banks were edged and fluted with morning fire; and ever and anon, from among the surges of their waves where they beat together, there rose up little knaps and knolls of clustered trees, or barren ridges, where earth spired darkly upon the sunshine in islands ascending from a sea of pearl.

Above Yarner the Moor had vanished under the snow. Its planes were smoothed, its heights were subdued, and

from the summits of the hills glittered the granite—here in tongues of white fire, where the snow was banked to the tor crowns; here intensely black, where the wind had swept them bare again. The magic of far-flung dazzling whiteness was over all things. It dwarfed dimensions, altered familiar perspectives, and hid familiar marks; it changed the contours and relations of distant tors, lifted the valley and lowered the hill.

Under the Moor, Ilsington church-tower lifted out of the fog, but beneath it the lower lands were all swept from sight; while above it the hills rose clearer and clearer, brighter and brighter by passages of white tilth and fallow netted with dark hedges, until the wilderness, soaring to the horizon, swept in planes of snow and broke in pinnacles of stone upon the blue of the winter sky.

Here, returning from business beyond Widecombe, tramped Timothy, the keeper. He had climbed from his home at dusk of dawn and was now passing back to it, under Hey Tor Rock, across the waste.

The ponies were scraping with their fore-feet round the furze clumps to get a bite of moss and dead grass; their thick winter coats shone chestnut, tawny, black, and made contrast with the tremendous light of the snow in sunshine; their breath burst in little jets of steam from their nostrils. The man tramped along to the crunch of his own steps. He kept his eyes on the ground, till the increasing scintillation and flash of the snow's innumerable facets dazed him and he lifted them and stood still a moment. It was a sound, however, that arrested him, for he heard cries of trouble. Not far off a girl was leading an ass by its bridle, but the beast proved unruly. It had backed between two stones and was caught fast between them.

Timothy hastened forward, and the girl gave him timid thanks. He would probably not have looked at her face before proceeding on his way, but her voice happened to attract him, and he stopped, spoke and enquired where she was going.

"To the little house at the top of Yarnar. I live there," she said.

"I'm bound for Yarner, too," he answered, "so I can lead your donkey for you. He won't play the fool with me. You live along with old Miss Widger, no doubt?"

"Yes, I'm her niece. Drusilla Whyddon's my name. And you'll be Mr Snow?"

He nodded, took the halter from her hand and led the donkey.

"You might get on it, if you mind to," he said. "'Tis heavy walking for a woman."

"Thank you—I'd sooner walk."

The girl was of good height and well built. She wore a red wool coat, and her drab skirts were caught up behind to keep them out of the snow. Her face was set in a wool bonnet tied tightly under her chin, and so seen it exhibited a rather pensive, gentle countenance without beauty. The features were regular, and the dark grey eyes were distinguished by a rare intensity, but Drusilla Whyddon's charm did not arrest. Most men missed it. Her voice was sweet. It vibrated, spoke of swift emotions and a nature not prone to deliberation. She was highly strung, and the incident of the donkey's accident had agitated her.

Timothy kept silence after she declined to ride, and his silence now made her nervous. She looked at him once or twice and noticed the strength of his shoulders and set of his neck.

At last she spoke, and he was glad.

"I hope Mrs Snow keeps well? She was talking to Miss Widger a bit ago, and feared the fish-pond alongside your house might give her rheumatism."

"She keeps well. I didn't know you knew her."

"We thought it would be neighbourly to call upon her, and my Aunt Jenny and me did so back-along."

"She didn't mention it. You know all about Yarner, I suppose?"

"Yes, I know it at all times in the year. You see, my father did Sir Percy Champernowne a great service—saved his son's life in the war. My father was wounded, and died of it a year after he came home; and Sir Percy, out of gratitude, let my mother have this cottage rent-free for her life. And mother, before she died two years ago,

asked if I might have it till—till I got a home of my own. And Sir Percy agreed. Then my old aunt come up from Ilsington to live with me. So—so if you find me in the woods picking up sticks now and again, I'll beg you not to mind it, because I'm allowed there."

"If you've got leave 'tis no business of mine. There's enough fallen wood in Yarner to light all the fires in the county."

"And there's to be plenty of game now you've come, I hear."

"As to that I can't promise much. I shall do my best to help Mr Kingdon, but there's a good bit against Yarner for preserving. They are very cold woods and the birds will be flying. And once they fly down to the in-country, they never fly up again. However, I'll be able to speak more about that come presently."

"You've turned a good few back, I hear?"

"And shall do so. That's the first thing. The last man was too easy, by all accounts."

Drusilla made no answer, and her silence excited his curiosity.

"I suppose you knew him, didn't you—John Redstone?"

"Yes, we knew him. He was a very kind man, and loved for everything to go easy and well."

"I know the sort—want to be friends all round—no good for a keeper—or anything else. If you've got no character, your friendship is of no account."

"He had plenty of character—a fierce man in some ways, but too kind-hearted to be angry for long at a time. He was a very good man and cheerful till things fell out wrong with him. Sir Percy was sorry to part from him."

"Sir Percy Champernowne has no character. Just one of they colourless creatures born with a silver spoon in his mouth. If he had come of the poor, he'd be breaking stones for his living. 'Tis all they'd ever have learned him to do."

"He's very good to his people and very open-handed. I thought he was a clever man, and I know he's a kind one."

Timothy grew impatient.

"I see you're the sort that never says a harsh word of anybody," he answered. "But I don't hold with that. I believe it makes for untruth in the long run. It ain't no disrespect to Sir Percy to say he's got a small brain—he can't help it. Only when one, like I am, thinks of all the advantages wasted on a man like that, we can't help feeling a bit impatient."

"I'm sure you must be very clever to say such things," she answered innocently.

"I think, that's all. I was what you might call fairly good material wasted. I'd have made a scholar if I'd got the chance. And yet things fell out so strange that I did get the chance—an offer of a whole year to get scholarship in London. But there was a condition to it that made the offer no use. That's why I'm at Yarner now."

"Very interesting, I'm sure."

He made as though he would explain, but did not. Instead he changed the subject abruptly.

"There's few more wonderful places than a big wood. You can learn a lot in it if you be the learning sort."

She brightened and nodded quickly.

"I'm sure you can. Mr Redstone said that, too."

"Ah, did he? I wonder what he made of it? You fetch out of a wood what you take in. My late master said that to me. It mightn't sound sense to you, but 'tis a very clever saying for all that. According to your bent of mind, so you see one side of a thing. But there's a lot of people whose only side be a blind side. They take no wits into the wood and they bring nothing out of it. Sir Percy, for instance. To hear him talk!"

"But the great men who come to shoot. Do you ever get a word with them?"

"No great men come to shoot. Men come to hunt birds—as if there wasn't anything better to hunt. But they're not great men. Their talk be of the latest cartridges. They don't bring anything into the woods but death for the creatures."

"You're terrible clever, I see," said the girl. But she meant it, and spoke without irony.

"This wood," he continued, ignoring the compliment and

pointing where Yarnier stretched beneath them, "is a jungle, and man's mind is a jungle of thoughts. The wood's choked with trees, and man's mind is choked with thoughts. And the trees kill each other, and thoughts kill each other. And every man's got to work his way through the living and dead. D'you understand that?"

"Yes, partly. I know the trees kill each other; I've seen them doing it."

She spoke intelligently, and Timothy, somewhat to his own surprise, found himself listening to a woman. His attitude to the sex was ungenial and ungallant, after the manner of his class; but now he listened, and heard shy thoughts and glimpsed a simple and sanguine philosophy that differed from his own but none the less argued observation and education. Drusilla was a forest girl: she haunted the woods for frank love of them, and knew them better than did the man as yet. She had also brought intelligence into them and had taken something out; but as at Dodona, so here: to different suppliants the murmur of the wind in the leaves, or the shout of it among naked branches came with different voices and uttered different oracles. The girl was deaf to much that the man had heard; he turned with impatience from some of the ideas she voiced. But not from all did he turn. Her wood-lore interested him exceedingly, for a lonely woman's mind and observation had noted things seldom interesting to women. Her facts impressed him—only her timorous deductions made him scoff. Yet there was that in her that struck his tongue to gentleness. He even showed a little rude courtesy before her. There trembled a shadow of uneasiness over his spirit—a shadow that none had thrown until now.

Their attitudes were defined in a phrase or two.

"Have you noticed how every creature gets uncomfortable and dissatisfied with its place when men come among 'em?" he asked.

"No," she said. "How should I? I'm not a man. I'm a girl, and I go among 'em alone. I don't fright and harry 'em. Perhaps 'tis because I don't carry a gun. They'll come close enough to me when I sit quiet, or go about slow and keep my eye from catching theirs."

"Ah! they won't look us in the face willingly."

"Perhaps because we're ugly to their little eyes."

He laughed at that—a short, sudden laugh; but his mirth came and went in a moment. He considered awhile, then felt an instinct to tell this new acquaintance about himself.

"Only one thing of note ever happened to me," he said. "Would you like to hear it?"

"I'm sure I should, Mr Snow, if it isn't to trouble you too much to tell it."

There was a little excitement in his voice when he spoke again.

"Funny I should offer to tell a stranger, and a woman at that; but you're not the chattering sort."

"No credit to me—just accident and loneliness."

He debated with himself again whether he should tell her, and finally decided to do so. His decision astonished him, but he persisted in it. He was slightly flurried, why he knew not.

"Don't repeat what I am going to say—to nobody at all."

"Be sure I shan't, then."

"Six months ago I was about my business, far ways from here, without a thought of any change, when my master come to me—a cunning man, and he knew how to tempt me. 'Twas not hid from him that I thirsted after knowledge and wanted to learn; and he came in the woods—an elderly, grey-whiskered man, with the slow, certain step of a strong beast that knows he's the cock of the walk. A clever man: haughty and lazy most times, but in earnest that day. He offered me to go to London for a year, that I might learn, learn, learn, and take classes and enlarge my mind. But there was a price: I'd got to marry a young woman with child. You see, his son had seduced a very nice girl, and the idea was that I should father the baby, that the woman should go to London and marry me, and that, presently, I should come back to my work, after a year away with my wife, and my son or daughter, as the case might be. The old chap offered me money, and what he knew would tempt me more: a chance to learn—and he argued very cleverly for it."

"Shameful!"

"Don't you say that. I didn't feel no anger—not with the old man. 'Twas a fair sporting offer—from his point of view. He didn't know better. He belonged to the ruling class, and thought he was well within his rights. They are terrible savage and indecent in their ideas, that sort. We be teaching 'em gradually."

"And the girl?"

"A brainless fool. She was frantic, and would have married the devil. She was feared of hell fire, poor soul, and thought all sorts of things would happen if she couldn't get a husband. There'd have been great evil come of it if I had married her. Because it would have been a bad deed in itself—not to marry her—but to father her child. That would have been to live a lifelong lie, and that must have been bad."

"Truest kindness to the child, however."

"How can you say that? Besides, should a man marry a woman he don't love, for money? Isn't that the very thing our class always flouts the upper people for doing? To have took that girl would have been to make her a whore twice over."

"What became of her?"

"An old flame married her, and thankful to do it. For love, not money. And she loved him for doing it—though she hadn't loved him before; and the child died, so it all went very well."

"And you lost your place?"

"Yes—the old man couldn't stand me about after I refused to pleasure him. It hurt him somehow. He felt things were going wrong with his class, and 'twas a bad sign that a servant could deny him such a wish."

"You like Yarner?"

"So far, though a cruel cold wood for birds, as I've told you."

"Here's where I live," said Drusilla, as she drew up beside a little house that stood beneath the Moor and above the woods. A road cut the hill horizontally here, and the house hid beside it in a copse of beech.

"Shall I lead the donkey in for you?"

"No, no, thank you; I'll do that. And I'm sure I feel very greatly obliged."

He looked full in her face for a moment while handing her the halter.

"You're welcome," he said. "And don't you tell again what I've told you."

Then he left her and descended into the forest. He spoke that night of Drusilla Whyddon and her aunt to his mother.

"I met the young woman and did her a good turn. She tells me you know them?"

"Yes; they came in a bit back-along to offer friendship, and I like the doubtful-eyed, young creature—a gentle, soft-hearted thing. But her aunt—that Miss Widger—she's different—a spinster through no fault of her own—plain and sour and sick, and full of her aches and pains and wrongs—a snarling thing, and very ungrateful to God."

"'Tisn't often you give anybody such a bad character," he answered. "Anyway, the young woman seems decent enough. I talked to her up over and found her full of a sort of narrow sense."

"Talked to her! Wonders never cease!" said Mrs Snow.

CHAPTER VI

CIVILISATION has stamped upon and flouted the ancient right of woman: to choose her mate from the best, the father of her children from the strongest. For sexual selection to-day is determined by many mean considerations, as of money or rank, which exist not in the unconscious world. There, the merits of the male, uninfluenced by economic problems, decide his cause; and in the lowermost social grades of humanity, where all are poor as a matter of course, and where distinctions of birth and breeding do not obtain, men and women who come together in equality, approach a little nearer to the primitive principle of natural choice and are freer to base their unions upon it than those whom chance has placed in a higher social order, with more complicated needs and more sophisticated ambitions.

Drusilla Whyddon was twenty-five, and as yet knew not passion. One man had loved her with all the force and fire of a forceful and fiery nature, but him she had not loved, although his own fervour had won for him a kindly affection. And now a very deep and significant interest moved in her for another man. Upon no spring-tide hour had he come, when love was in the air; to no willing or wanton woman's heart had he come, where sex is ever awake and alert to seek and win the male; but out of the chill snow, to a soul as chill and virginal, had Timothy appeared, and his candour of mind wakened wonder, his austerity inspired a little fear and much respect. Drusilla, albeit sensitive enough, felt no morbid suspicion that this interest was unbecoming. She did not lack for imagination, and permitted herself to consider the keeper

as a friend. She contrasted him with his predecessor John Redstone, and measured the difference; she recalled Timothy's convictions and opinions; she marked where his life had led him to beliefs widely different from her own. There was a power of self-assertion about him that appealed to her lack of it; the masterful in him attracted her own weak will. She speculated upon him and his future; she considered his appearance, and as yet, unblinded by love, regretted that he stood not a little taller, and that his voice did not rise and fall on a more mellow note. It was of a harsh quality—so Drusilla reflected—perhaps proper to the hard things that it said. She reposed finally on a contented consideration of his cleverness and power. She asked her aunt of him, and what she heard made her unhappy. Then she roused herself and took herself to task for wasting thought upon the man. Miss Widger was an intelligencer more active than accurate, but she had all the gossip of Ilsington at her fingers' ends.

"No call for you to start dreaming about that chap," she said. "He's far above us, and has the chance of rising to riches; so, being a sane sort of young man, he'll take it. Nephew to Lot Snow—him that devours widows' houses down to the village. No doubt he'll do the same when his chance comes."

The speaker was old and withered and sick. She suffered from a rodent ulcer on her face, and she displayed the injury that all might see and be shocked. Physical pain had gnawed into more than her flesh, for her outlook on life was based in personal experience, and the joy of life had ever been a thing hidden from her.

"God knows I wish you could happen on a chap to care about; for I shall be dead afore very long—that's a blessed certainty—and what'll happen to a lone, homely thing like you when I'm took is the first of my many troubles."

"I can work, Aunt Jenny."

"Work, yes—that's what our family was born to. But to work and to get work ban't the same thing. I've done oceans of needful chores in my weary years, yet here am I at the end of 'em no better off. I'd wish you more luck than I've had."

"I don't want anybody but you; and you oughtn't to take on like this, for doctor said you was a marvel and good for a long time yet."

"I don't want to be good for a long time. What's a long time to me? Pain and more pain, and more and more—that's all this world can promise me."

"'Twill be made up to you in the next, dear Aunt Jenny."

"I should hope so; *I should just hope so!*" answered the elder. "Mercy I've never had, and 'twill be too late for that when I'm dead; but justice I've a right to demand—'tis my lawful right, and small thanks due when I get it!"

Miss Widger was rolling dough as she spoke, and she slapped the stuff bitterly, almost vindictively, to point her attitude to the future.

Now Drusilla Whyddon strove to think less upon Timothy Snow, for this information seemed to block all personal considerations or possibilities. None the less, she remembered that he had spoken of their meeting again; and when they did so, a few days later, she was glad. But she found herself nervous in his company. She recollected how greatly he had filled her mind of late, and felt an unreasoning dread that the fact would somehow escape to him from her. His direct and open manner set her at ease, however, and she was moved to find that what had happened to her was his own experience also. But he, apparently, felt no instinct to conceal it. He told her frankly that he had thought of her more than once since their walk in the snow.

They met on the way to worship, and Timothy's mother fell in step with Miss Widger, while the young man and woman walked in front. Unconsciously they quickened their pace as the subject of their speech interested them, and so it happened that they reached the church some while before their elders.

"Your donkey was none the worse, I hope?" he began. "I'd thought to see you before to-day, but didn't get so far as your home."

"He's all right. I never thanked you for your trouble."

"I was a good bit interested in what we talked about."

I haven't met a woman before that cared a button for my work."

"The woods were my playground always. I never had no children to play with, and so didn't miss 'em. I feel at home among the trees."

"There's interesting things to be marked even in winter."

"I know. I look at your gamekeeper's gallows sometimes when I pass that way. But I'm always sorry to see new creatures nailed there."

He nodded.

"And I'm sorry to put 'em there. And, to tell the truth, I don't like shooting hawk and stoat—just for being themselves. But they are poachers, and we can't give them six months in klink, like t'other sort, so we've got to shoot 'em. That's the way of the world. If you ban't sociable and willing to fall in with the ideas of the strongest, they stamp on you. If you've got a bending nature, you fit in; but if your character be made of hawk and stoat, you stand alone."

"How about you, then? You told me——"

"That's different. I'm an understanding creature and know that I must give in a bit. You have got to give if you want to take, and if you go for a gamekeeper, you must do a keeper's work, though in your heart you may be sorry to do it. Owls I won't shoot, and I've told the master so. 'Tis only ignorant fools, like the last man, who shot them. They do good, not harm."

Drusilla coloured, for she had a loyal spirit.

"Mr Redstone wasn't a fool, by any means. A fine, big-hearted chap."

"He shot owls, however, for there's the rames¹ of three owls—two brown and a white—nailed up yet."

"He thought they did harm, I suppose. Why for shouldn't he be right about 'em and you wrong?"

A straight question of this sort always interested Timothy, and now he set out to explain the natural history of the matter at great length. He convinced Drusilla, and made her admit that he was right. They spoke of the woods, and he asked her if she had observed certain phenomena; while she told him of things that as yet he had not noticed

¹ Rames: skeletons.

They became excited ; their eyes sparkled, and she won one of his rare laughs from him. He looked at her often, and she looked at him, and remarked in secret on his Sunday clothes. They seemed better than his station, and he wore them with ease, not laboriously.

Something he said gave her pause.

"But you go to church?" she asked.

"Yes—to please my mother—and to please myself, for that matter. I like sermons. They may be dull, but they are the words and thoughts of men who have been better educated and had more chances than I have. It amuses me to see how feebly some of them think. But some of them are wise. The clergyman at Ilsington is very wise."

Their elders joined them presently at the church door, and all through the service Drusilla wondered whether she would see Timothy again afterwards and perhaps walk homeward with him. But this did not happen, because the Snows were dining with their relatives at Ilsington. A family party had been arranged by Lot—indeed more than a family party, for Willes Leaman and his daughter were present, and Timothy sat beside Audrey at the table.

The girl expected some amusement when he recognised her; she hoped that he might reveal a little embarrassment, but he did not. He remembered her at once, yet made no allusion whatever to their first meeting.

She, however, did so, and talked more than Timothy during the progress of the meal. She chaffed and laughed, and showed a sense of humour which was wasted upon him.

"Don't know how 'tis, Mr Snow, but ever since you warned me out of Yarnier so sharp, I've felt drawn to it. I believe I go there now just because you told me not to. You'd best to bid me come if you want me away."

"I don't want you away. 'Tis what's right—that's all. You set a bad example, and some day I shall be hauled over the coals for it."

"Oh no, you won't. Squire's grandson is a very good friend of mine; he'd stand up for me. He met me a week ago and asked me to stop and watch him drawing a picture. Mister Eustace I mean. He likes me. He writes poetry, too."

"A spoilt young man — like all only children. His grandfather makes a fool of him."

"Don't you talk about only children! What was you?"

He shook his head.

"I had to work for my living, and my mother's not the sort to spoil boy or girl."

Audrey regarded him with pleasure, and noticed his clothes as Drusilla had done. His hands were very clean and not rough with work. He piqued her, and she saw a marked difference between him and most of her friends. Her jokes quite failed upon him, and where Mr Moyle and others would have roared with laughter, Timothy only smiled faintly or showed no amusement at all. She was wayward, changed her mind about the dishes, and made him wait upon her. Presently she looked into his face and asked him the colour of her eyes.

"There's more than one opinion — more than two, for that matter. You're pretty clever, I should think: so what colour are they?"

He looked, and the elders watched the ordeal. Her lovely face was brought near to his, and her eyes challenged him with all their power. But for the first time in Audrey's experience no emotion touched a man as he gazed into them. She drooped them, lifted them, made a great pretence of keeping steady and serious, twinkled, flashed, pursed her mouth and presently laughed in very joyous fashion. Her father and Lot Snow regarded her with admiration; the serving-girl stood still and grinned; Lot's old sister and Timothy's mother both viewed the scene with some discomfort. Only the young man appeared to be entirely unmoved.

"They change," he said coolly. ". . . There's a lot of different colours in 'em. Slate-colour with brown dots, I should call 'em."

"That's not very flattering, anyway."

"Did you want me to flatter? What's the sense of that? They're very pretty eyes, and you're a very pretty girl. Of course everybody knows that."

"Thank you for nothing!" she said.

A lack of subtlety and *finesse* marked the entertainment,

but that gave none pause. Audrey and Timothy both knew what was hoped and expected from them, and she attached no importance to this preliminary skirmish under the eyes of other people. "Wait till I get him alone," she thought. She liked him as a man, for he was strong and clean and healthy, but she feared that he might be a hard and unsympathetic husband. Indeed, the idea of a husband was not wholly pleasant to her. She preferred to rove, and there was in her a natural bent to intrigue and adventure that the very word 'husband' struck upon antipathetically. But since it seemed that she must marry, she felt that here was a man essentially marriageable. To win him, even if she did not wed him, was now her desire. She determined upon conquest, and doubted not that she would soon learn enough about him to make him love her.

A little light was let into her mind presently, and she began to doubt whether the contemplated game would be worth the candle. Timothy showed himself a hard man where women were concerned—harder even than his bachelor uncle.

Lot Snow reproved some sentiment he uttered disrespectful to the sex.

"You mustn't talk like that, my young shaver," he said. "I'm sure your mother ought to have taught you better. Women ain't domestic animals."

"Aren't they—how many are not? How many ask for more than food and clothes for themselves and their children? And how many are worth more?"

"You say that! The Lord pity your wife!" exclaimed Audrey. "You're wrong—every way. That sort of thing's a bit old-fashioned, Mr Snow—and you'll live to find it out if you ever have any truck with a girl. Women are no more domestic animals nowadays than cats are. They may pretend it—to gull the likes of you—but 'tis only pretence. They think for themselves and run their own shows. And if their shows don't please their fathers and mothers—then they run 'em out of sight. You're the sort——"

She stopped. Her elders were all listening.

"Go on—let me have it," said Timothy.

But she laughed, and said no more. She was thinking that, after all, a man of Timothy's cast-iron opinions and prejudices might not be very difficult to hoodwink. But to waken in him love for a woman did promise to be difficult.

Dinner was interrupted before its completion, and a man galloped to the entrance, alighted from a smoking horse and hammered loudly at the door.

"'Tis Johnny Redstone," said Lot. "None but he would do a thing like this. The rascal—he's smarting early—yowling afore he's hit, you might say."

"Shall I go to the door?" asked Sibella Snow of her brother; but he forbade her.

"No—not you nor yet Milly—let him cool a bit; then I'll send him going myself. The Lord's Day ban't the time to talk of my mortgage, and he ought to know that."

From his place Timothy Snow was able to look out of the window and mark the man who waited there.

"'Tis he who did your work at Yarnier before you," explained Timothy's aunt.

"And I had some ado to shift him," added Lot. "Sir Percy thought a deal of him—there was that about the man that took his fancy—birds of a feather, no doubt; but John Redstone was careless, and I caught his master in a cross-grained mood and sang your praises. Then he sacked Redstone while still in a rage, and after, when he changed his mind again and wanted Redstone to stop, the man wouldn't. He went off to his farm instead, and now his farm has got to be my farm. No fault of his, but his father before him. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. Religion and nature are at one there. His father treated me shameful, and snapped his fingers at me on his death-bed. I steadied him even there, however. He was sneering and deriding me, and I said: 'Listen, George Redstone, afore your ears are closed for ever. So sure as the death that you're going to, my man, you'll pay for your fun. You think you've done me, but remember the son you leave behind you—the apple of your eye, as well I know. You've done me, as you think, but there's him to reckon with, and the pound of flesh I can't get out of you, I'll have off him. And you keep that in your mind

when you draw your last breath!' So I told the man, and he didn't laugh no more after that. He'd forgot his son, with his wits wandering just near the end. But I drove it into his fading senses, and he died pretty sick I'm told. All right and justice."

The visitor knocked again. Then Lot rose heavily, wiped his mouth, and lumbered to the door.

Timothy had marked a tall, sturdy man, with chestnut hair and a freckled face. His nose was aquiline, his eyes were an amber red. Hot temper stood declared, but his mouth under a dark auburn moustache showed kindly lines. It was, however, as strongly moulded as the chin beneath it. Waywardness and faulty judgment marked his brow. He was a man of whom at first glance a critic had guessed that he might be his own enemy.

"D'you know the day, John Redstone?" asked Lot Snow.

"Yes, I do. You oughtn't to write such a letter as I got yesterday if you don't want a quick answer. How could I wait under that till to-morrow?"

"You'll soon larn how. Patience ban't one of your vartues. Your father weren't strong on it, neither. But 'tis a thing you'll have to come to afore you're much older. I'll see you next Thursday at four of the clock. I shall be riding to Cator Court that day, and if you await me at Longworthy I'll hear you. If you want to cuss anybody, cuss your dead father. 'Twill comfort you and won't hurt him."

"Cuss him? Not I. I wasn't worthy to black his boots. I haven't come to cuss anybody. I'm here to sing small. My father's father lives with me, and he's told me how it stands. Can't you give me five minutes?"

The man was evidently making mighty efforts to control himself. He smiled, but the other shook his head.

"Won't do, John."

"I've had a good bit against me of late. Lost my job, and lost—well, more than you know, or anybody knows. If I'm to lose my little farm also—well, it's a poor look-out. You know 'tis only a question of time."

"Not a word to-day. I can't give you any sort of hope, so don't think it. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

The other still fought with himself. His big, freckled hand gripped hard over his riding stock. He was silent, and his smile perished; he flogged his gaitered leg. At length he spoke as Lot prepared to go in again.

"Very well, Mr Snow—at Longworthy o' Thursday at four o'clock. Good-morning."

"Good-day to you."

The elder returned to his dinner; the other mounted a horse that chanced to be much the colour of his own hair and rode away.

"On his marrow-bones a'ready," said Lot, as he returned to the family party.

"A fine figure of a man, seemingly," remarked Timothy.

"He'll cut a very foolish figure afore long, I'm thinking," said Mr Leaman, looking enquiringly at Lot.

"A short-sighted creature. He might have saved the situation if he'd liked when his father died. But no: he must go his own way. And now he's run his head up against the law—as I expected he would."

Audrey Leaman knew all about Redstone in another connection.

"No harm naming it, I suppose," she said. "He was terrible sweet on Drusilla—Drusilla Whyddon—her whose father did Sir Percy a service and died. She lives along with that old horror, Jenny Widger, at the top of the woods; and Mr Redstone was in love with her—head over ears—a tremendous lover, by all accounts; but she hadn't any use for him. She was better educated a lot, though not much to look at. A fine chap, too."

Timothy felt interested, yet wondered at his own interest. That Audrey should slight Drusilla's appearance provoked him, and she saw it.

"Did you know Redstone, my dear?" asked Lot, and Audrey's father laughed.

"Know him! You show me any male as she don't know this side of Plymouth. She'd make friends with a scarecrow if it wore trousers."

"Men are more interesting than women," declared Audrey.

"And so they are," agreed Lot Snow. "So they are all

the way, and I like your pluck for not being ashamed to say so. Every woman knows it, but how many would slap it out same as that? Now you and Master Timothy Silent here can go in the churchyard and look at thē graves, or, if that isn't fun enough, you may take a walk and come home for tea."

"We didn't think to stop to tea," said Mrs Snow doubtfully.

"You will, however," declared her brother-in-law.

CHAPTER VII

UPON the northern ridge of Yarner, in the midst of the main wood, there spread a clearing, waist-deep in ling. Oaks were scattered through it, and the sere heather broke at one point away, where a small patch of grass extended. Here stood a crab-tree with its worthless harvest of red and gold still scattered about its grey feet. The acrid, little apples shone brightly upon the ground, but no bird or beast had touched them.

Now, however, a woman, sitting under the tree, amused herself with the bright globes, played at catch-ball with them, and flung them at a man who slouched at full length beside her.

"Taste one again, Fred," she said. "I loved to see the face you made when you bit one just now."

Mr Moyle refused.

"You're too fond of seeing me make faces. You're a cruel thing. You don't care who you hurt, or what you hurt, so long as you get your fun out of it."

"Fun! Little enough fun going for me. Life's as dull as the weather, very near."

"Not for you. You do what you please and go your own sporting way, and have the men at your feet for the moving of a finger."

He spoke with discontent, and lifted his good-looking face to her. Hungry love reigned on it.

"What about Timothy Snow?"

"He'll come the minute you set about him. And he's got his uncle to deal with, anyway. By God, it makes me rage to think that chap—— Weak in his head is the only word for him!"

The wind blew cold and dry above them. It was a day in February when scarcely any life moved in the forest—a despondent day whose purpose did not appear; an uneventful day in the procession of days, taking its place and passing without leaving one sign.

“Let’s get up and walk a bit, then we’ll come back here. My toes are cold and I’ve got the blues,” said Miss Leaman. “As to Timothy—though I haven’t got beyond calling him ‘Mr Snow’ to his face—he’s interesting, of course—not just because he’s who he is and the old people want us to be married—but for himself. He’s clever and proud, and thinks women be made from poorer mud than men.”

“Gives himself airs enough, no doubt. And you silly girls take him at his own value.”

“Not us. He’s a man that stands well with men. The men that men like always interest me most.”

“And you sink to dance about after him—you, the loveliest woman that ever come out of Ilsington.”

“No, I don’t. I’m learning him, that’s all. Some men are better for being snubbed, and some men won’t stand it. And some men like us to be humble and creep to ’em, and some men like us to carry our noses high, so that they have to do the creeping themselves. He’s the first sort. He’s taking stock of me, same as I am of him. There’s a good bit hangs to it; but he isn’t going to be hurried, any more than I am. He’ll have to let me get to know him before I can decide.”

“I believe he’s a thick-headed, everyday sort of fool under all that silence. There’s a lot only escape being known for fools because they keep their mouths shut. ’Tis only through a man’s speech you can see into his head.”

“He’s clever enough,” she declared, “and he knows it. He’s a fine chap, and it’s no good pretending he isn’t, Fred. I don’t say I’ll marry him, but I’ll make him want to marry me if I can.”

They rose and walked together. He grumbled and growled because Audrey’s support of Timothy seemed based on such slender ground. The policeman began to fear that she would never marry him, but he resented the thought of her marrying another. His emotions with

respect to Audrey Leaman ascended far higher than any he had before experienced, and now he looked ahead and hoped that she would not marry at all. He thought of her as a free lance, who might some day repay his worship and suffer him to be one with others on a string. It was not a noble ideal, but had slowly come to replace others more elevated and more hopeless.

They met an elderly man in the woods and spoke with him. He was clad in corduroy, and made a harmony with the silver of some old birches that fell under his axe. Stark, white chips of wood were scattered everywhere, livid under the grey about him, and his axe flashed wanly and echoed with hollow thuds through the deadness and stagnant stillness of the hour. Seth Champion gazed out of round, owlish eyes set close together above a heavy nose. His hair and moustache were grey; his face and his back were round. He wore a hat like a great withered leaf, and the sole spark of colour about him appeared in a dull crimson scarf tied round his throat.

"'Tis Champion, my father's man," said Audrey. "He's let him out to Yarnier for this clearing work. Seth's a good, harmless sort—with a mind like a sheep's." Then she turned to the labourer and spoke loud. "How d'you like it up here, Seth?"

The man was very deaf, and hollowed his hand over his ear. He gathered her meaning some time after she had spoken.

"They be very pleased with me, so Snow, the keeper, says."

"So they ought to be," said Audrey. It was second nature to her to say pleasant things to any man—old or young.

'Ess—very pleased. But what be you and policeman Moyle doing in the woods? I suppose keeper won't quarrel with 'e?" He looked doubtfully upon them.

"Yes, he would—double quick. Of course Mr Kingdon, the head-keeper, would look t'other way; but Timothy Snow—he'd have us up for trespassing, if I know him."

"He's about; I wafn 'e!"

As if to prove this, there came the sound of gun-fire not half a mile distant.

"That's him," said Mr Moyle. "Well, I don't want to meet him, because very likely he would have a row with me."

"You're my friend, ban't you?" asked the girl.

"Yes—but that wouldn't make me his friend."

Campion heard nothing. He stood with his axe as a stick, and frowned and strained his head on one side because he could not follow them.

Audrey turned to him.

"Snow's a good sort—eh?"

"You ought to know, missy." The labourer grinned, for the proposed romance was not hidden from him.

"Fred, here, says he's conceited and selfish and hard."

"Since you ax me, I reckon policeman's right. Mind you, I shouldn't have said nothing if you hadn't named it, because I wouldn't offer my opinions to anybody. But since you ax me, I say he's a vain man and terrible hard for a young man. Strong in his own conceit, without a doubt. A hard nut, in fact."

"Miss Leaman thinks she'll crack him presently—when she wants to," said Moyle.

"Not her," answered the woodman. "The girl ain't built to come around that man—unless 'tis Drusilla Whyddon—that orphan up over—you know."

"Her!" cried Audrey in frank surprise.

"I say nothing; but I've my eyes, though my ears be dull. I've marked them walking together more'n once."

Audrey showed keen interest.

"What the devil do the men see in Drusilla!" she exclaimed. "Johnny Redstone was mad for her, but she didn't want him; now Snow's found her, seemingly."

"Don't that show you what he is at bottom?" asked the policeman eagerly. "He's only a dull dog, else he'd have been at you, morning, noon, and night, from the time he came. 'Tis like offering cheese-cakes to a pig, setting you before that man; and the sooner your father knows it, the better for your dignity."

Audrey was now all eagerness to meet Snow before

they left the wood. A meeting might produce a scene, and she felt in the mood for a scene. She hungered and thirsted to show him her cleverness, and the sharpness of her tongue, but she hid this desire from Mr Moyle. They left Campion and walked on together. Dusk was coming down, and Frederick desired to be gone; but Audrey delayed. She wandered to a woodland path that ran, like a backbone, down the ridge to the valley beneath, and sat presently where the birches had been felled and piled. A stream wound here, and its banks were yellow with the first blossoms of golden saxifrages.

She guessed that Timothy might presently come this way; therefore she sat on the wood by the path, bade Moyle stop beside her, and was gracious to him and made him happy. She played with his moustache and curled the points of it, and let him put his face close to hers. He implored for a kiss, and reminded her that she owed him one. She denied it, but let him kiss her little finger. He lingered over it and licked it; whereupon she drew it away from him, and called him a pig, and dried it on his jacket.

It was then that a dog—a black spaniel—came nosing down the path, found them and began to bark violently. Audrey knew it for Snow's dog, and told the policeman that the keeper was coming.

"Hide, then!" he said. "Let's get under the timber! There'll be the deuce to pay if he catches me here."

"No, there won't—not if I say you're my friend."

"What's the sense of that? He don't allow you here yourself—you said so."

"You see me face him out!" said Audrey.

She settled herself comfortably upon the felled silver birches, like a queen on her throne, called the barking dog by its name, and waited. Moyle again begged her to hide or run away.

"If you won't go, then let me. Let me get across the water and up the hill. I'll wait there for you," he said.

But she refused, and indeed it was too late, for Timothy

Snow followed not far behind his dog. He saw the standing and the sitting figure through the fading light, and approached.

"These woods are private and you're trespassing," began Timothy. Then he recognised both sinners and stopped. "What does this mean?" he asked the man.

"It means that two people are taking a walk, and you mustn't put on such airs," said Mr Moyle. He was nervous of the keeper, and knew himself much in the wrong; but he desired to shine before Audrey, and now she supported him.

"'Tis nonsense between friends, Mr Snow," she said impatiently; "and I suppose we're friends—you and me,—at any rate. Fred and I aren't doing a penn'orth of harm, as you very well know, and there's no call for you to bully us like this."

She sat perched well above him, and smiled deliciously to lessen the severity of her speech; but the keeper was angry. He settled her with a few words and then accosted the man.

"You're past praying for, seemingly. Haven't you got no self-respect, girl? I suppose not, else you wouldn't be here. I can't take you by the neck and hale you out; but you'll hear more of it, I warn you!" Then he turned to Mr Moyle. "As for you, you're different—a policeman, and ought to understand something of what law and order mean. But it seems you know no better than to break the law and trespass where trespassers are prosecuted. You must come philandering here with this woman and——"

"Not at all—not at all," answered Frederick. "I won't have Miss Leaman spoke about rudely in my hearing, or——"

They stood together, frowning into each other's eyes. One was much alarmed, though he pretended not to be; the other had lost his temper.

"You'd answer me, you brazen rascal!" cried Snow. "You think because this stupid girl is here that my hands are tied, but I'll soon show you they're not. What do I care for her feelings? Don't you know her sort? I do."

She wants to see the fur fly. 'Tis meat and drink to a woman like this woman to watch men at each other's throats. So take that and be gone! And next time I catch you here, I'll give you the properest hiding ever you got in your life!"

He struck Moyle a swinging blow on the side of his head and knocked his hat off. The policeman cried out, then picked up his hat and hastened down the hill. The noise frightened some roosting pheasants, and they rose with a great din from a spruce close at hand. Mr Moyle had turned very white and trembled in every limb. But he did not come back. He stood now below, twenty yards off by the stream, and shouted.

"You shall rue this, Timothy Snow; you shall rue this day, and God's my judge if I don't pay you! You wait till I get my chance, and I'll make you sorry ever you was born!"

"Be off, you rubbish!" roared the keeper; "and you get after him, you worthless thing," he said to Audrey.

But the trend of affairs had rather served to cheer her. She was mildly sorry for her policeman, for herself she was glad. She read jealousy into Snow's behaviour, and took great satisfaction in his anger.

Now she assumed her haughtiest manner and descended very slowly from the wood pile.

"I pity you," she said. "I pity any man who can make such a silly show of himself for nothing at all. Didn't I tell you that your master's grandson, Mister Eustace, gave me leave to come here when I pleased? The Leamans aren't used to this sort of behaviour, and I'll thank you never to speak to me again, horrid ruffian that you are! I've done with you, and I'll let everybody know it, my father included. So now then!"

"So long as you've done with Yarner, I don't care a button what else you have or haven't done with," he answered. "And don't talk trash about young Mr Champernowne making you free of the wood, because that's a lie."

"I shall come here when I please, and go where I please, and stop as long as I please," retorted Audrey. "And

when you turn Drusilla Whyddon out of the woods, then you can turn me out, and not sooner."

She regretted this speech a moment later, for Snow laughed at it.

"Ah! I see. Well, you take a leaf out of that girl's book. She can teach you a lot worth your knowing—including manners."

"Manners be your strong point, without a doubt," retorted Audrey. "Perhaps you'll teach me how to behave pretty to my betters—since you're so terrible clever at it."

Mr Moyle still stood by the stream and eyed the keeper with malignancy.

"Come on, Audrey," he said. "Leave the man to think on what I spoke to him. He's struck me, and I'll strike him, come presently. But not with fists. I'll settle him—I'll——"

Then Timothy made a stride towards the policeman, and Frederick jumped over the stream.

"No, you don't!" he said. "I'm not going to batter and bruise your body. 'Tis your heart I'll batter and bruise! You've done for yourself, as sure as the night is down. I'll never forgive nor yet forget this. I'll wait for my chance if 'tis fifty year in coming. But I'll get in the last word, and you'll live to see it!"

Audrey Leaman joined him.

"I've had enough," she said.

They sank away out of the woods, and the line of their departure was marked for Timothy by the cry of frightened birds. But he soon recovered his temper, and laughed grimly to himself before he reached home.

"A pretty pair. It throws a light on her. God knows what she's good for. Not much, seemingly. To marry her! A fool's trick that; and if a man wasn't a fool before, he'd very soon look a fool after. God help any decent chap out of the clutches of they love-hunting women! A vampire's better than the likes of them!"

Meanwhile Moyle and Audrey descended to the valley and climbed out upon the other side. They entered the great western wood of fir and pine, passed the deserted

copper mine that reared its ruined stack upon the fringes of it, and presently left the domains of Yarner behind them.

"What awful jealousy!" said the girl, breaking a long silence.

But Mr Moyle would not allow this.

"'Twasn't jealousy. 'Tis an evil spirit in the man, more like. To dare to lay his finger on me! For two pins I'd have smashed him where he stood!"

"I'd have given you twenty pins to do it! But don't you be silly, Fred. You're a nice, tame mouse, and I think a lot of you, but you cut a terrible weak figure afore him. I can't help laughing, though I'm ever so sorry, all the same."

The man flushed deeply.

"You wait!" he said. "No, you're right—I'm not the animal he is, and I won't pretend it. I couldn't have smashed him; but I'll do worse—I'll ruin him. That's not beyond my power, for I've got tons more brains than him. You wait and see."

"And I'll help you—if I suffer much more from him," she promised. "I'm afraid he's got no heart. And yet—he wouldn't have been so madly jealous of you if he hadn't felt angry to see us together like that in the dark. Yes, he was jealous all right. I ought to know. And I'll tell you one thing that may interest you: if I can't make him love me, I'll make him hate me."

"That's sense," answered the other. "His sort want rubbing in the dust. 'Rubbish,' mark you! 'Rubbish' was the name for me, and 'trash' for you. A nice thing! Well, we'll see if my rubbish and your trash can't—— Yes, let him wait and watch. I'll answer that blow and—— A stiff necked madman! Let him see who laughs last and longest."

Audrey knew that the cowardly Moyle was clever and stood well with his superiors.

"You wait for me," she said. "I feel just the same as you, and I'll take very good care he shall smart for this sooner or later. But don't you do anything in a hurry. For that matter, there's nothing you can do yet."

"I know that. I can bide my time. The man's got his weak spots, and I'll find 'em presently."

"And if you don't, I will," promised Audrey. But in reality she was not the least concerned for her friend, nor did she harbour genuine ill-will towards Timothy Snow. Indeed, she returned home in the best of spirits, and considered the day as one well and usefully spent. She believed that Timothy had flamed into a hearty jealousy at this meeting in the woods.

"He shall meet me with a man there again afore long," she told her father, who listened with wonder at the adventure. "Yes, he shall. Not Fred, though. He's had his dose. I'll take somebody else!"

"Best you be careful, or else you'll fright him off once for all. He's not the sort as will let you have your fill of friends—men or women. If he thinks you're light, he'll look at you no more."

"Leave him to me," she answered with misplaced confidence. "You wait. I don't say that I'll marry the man yet, for there's a nasty side to him, but I do say I'll make him want to marry me. I've seen signs."

The substance of this interview Willes Leaman related presently to his friend, Lot Snow, and the latter was glad to hear it.

"I hope the maid be right. We mustn't hurry 'em. But warn her not to scare him. He's a prig, and ban't ripened and mellowed as yet. Let her hang off a bit, and see if that will make him a thought more oncoming. I've had him here again, and he don't want to turn farmer, so he still says. Patience be the only thing. The young call for more and more patience as the years go by; and they have less and less patience with the old. A time's coming, Leaman, when the rising generation will make laws to knock on the head every man past his sixtieth birthday. They can't believe in us no more after that age, and can't allow that we be worth our keep at all, come we linger on to three score and ten."

CHAPTER VIII

A GREAT clash of passion with conviction had begun in Timothy Snow's mind. Until the present, like most virgin-hearted men he had followed his mental bent, made his own good, and been exceedingly well satisfied with his own wits and accomplishments; but henceforth he began to be less affirmed and more moderate in his opinions. Happiness and security assumed a different aspect seen through the new emotions of his heart; days that had looked full and sufficiently important and interesting became empty and barren. He was alarmed about his work, that had until now so amply sufficed him, for sometimes it became an actual trouble. He fought this mighty experience for a little while, feared its effect upon him, considered its complications and sought to evade it. And this he did from no consideration of temporal welfare or the good-will of his Uncle Lot. No minor argument influenced an effort to escape from love, but a major fear that any such circumstance would come between him and his ideals of life and lessen his usefulness as an independent and unentangled spirit. He had a good deal plumed himself on his wisdom, and at first he resented this intrusion as a weakness. He believed that love was a mere trick of nature, and that it were better to recognise it as such and evade it. He remembered a girl who had mildly interested him when he was eighteen; and honestly he fancied that he had experienced the true passion already and, thanks to his own strength of character, escaped the consequences. In an early conversation with Drusilla he had told her as a fact that he had loved. "I've been through it all," he said, "and nothing that can happen to me can hurt me, because

I've won to a bit of sense on most subjects, and have put myself out of the reach of Nature's teeth and claws. You can't trust her in everything, but if you know what designs she's got on you, you can be ready for her." -

She wondered to hear him talk so positively, but already he filled her life unknown to himself, and all he did was very good to her, and all he said was very wise. She blushed in secret after this speech of his, because she guessed that he had seen that she liked him, and was warning her that he stood above such trivial interests as a woman could furnish. She thought much upon him and pondered his words. She was observant, and perceived that the accident of a solitary life and naturally introspective mind had curbed and limited Timothy's knowledge in many directions.

The keeper, in truth, had built a rule of conduct on bases too narrow, and omitted from his scheme of things certain practical ingredients impossible to ignore. Trees cannot teach one his obligation to his neighbour, or his duty to himself. The hygiene of the young man's soul called for attention; it was faulty; and now, to his discomfort, he began to find this out. His theories took a new and unfamiliar shape in this light from within. Like Plato before him, he held the doubtful opinion that happiness belongs to those most free from desire; and he had not perceived that he who has strength to gratify his desires—is man enough to want and man enough to win—feels a brighter fire and a mightier joy than any contemplative spirit who has merely slain his hungers in the icy upper air of thought. He was very raw and green and serious-minded; he threatened to degenerate into an arid, unsympathetic and uninteresting man; but now the magic cup was suddenly lifted to his lips, and at first he feared and hesitated. For he could fear and was not as brave as his words. Presently, however, a fume of the wine entered his brain, illuminated it and made all things seem new. No longer did he look cowardly on the crisis; no longer did he tremble for his own future; he soared to a nobler height, became a man and trembled for his own worth. He looked back and blushed that he could have thought

of himself; instead he now scorned himself, seen under this pure light. He continued to be uneasy indeed, but it was with a new uneasiness: the knowledge of his own imperfection. He drank the cup and loved and lived for this new thing, and laughed to see his careful edifice of theory and opinion swept down the wind by a woman. He abandoned the old, mean, spiritless ideal of freedom; to be a slave to such a one as Drusilla was better than all freedoms. To the cultured mind his change of attitude may be explained in terms of mighty names. Until the present, given knowledge of them, Timothy would doubtless have held the happiness of a Socrates greater in degree than that of an Alexander; a Newton's days worthier than a Nelson's. But now his heart was afire and aflame from the old torch, and he welcomed the sting of the burn as well as the glow of the heat. Indeed, his self-restrained existence had been a fitting prelude for this grander and more vital harmony. He came to it, at any rate, in the dayspring of his manhood, and its first perfect work was to correct his perspective of self and make him a more modest and more humble creature.

The lovers met on the common ground of the forest, and Timothy compared his knowledge with Drusilla's feeling, and found that her mind cast a wider net than his, and gathered from the data of the woods a sort of lore they did not spell to him. *Flora, sylva, fauna*—all were good to her—and sometimes he differed from her on questions of sentiment, and sometimes he admitted her point of view. Their ideas and discoveries were not new except to themselves. They were, of course, ignorant, but they surprised each other by display of their gleanings, and the man thought the woman's observation extraordinary, and the woman believed the man to be an amazing wonder. Her view was more poetical and therefore more wide than his. "'Tis almost awful to think of all these countless, sleepless, busy things growing, growing, growing night and day, and bursting up through the earth," she said to him on a spring morning. "Think of the terrible driving force behind bud-break and the rush of the sap! It frights me." He nodded doubtfully, and knew that his mind would never

have made that picture. He also knew that the thought was very significant.

In the matter of sentiment they, as yet, had offered no mutual interchanges; but spring was on the girl's side there, and spring now precipitated the situation.

As for Drusilla, there had awakened in her heart the most passionate love. She hid it carefully till she found that she interested Timothy; and this fact, after comparing her private experience of him with the opinion that he had created elsewhere, she could not fail to perceive; because from all others, both men and women, he was indifferent and aloof, while his attitude to her had always revealed a very real, if reserved, friendliness. When he had seen her, he had gone out of his way to meet her. Then he had offered to show her things in the woods, and she, growing brave gradually, had plumbed his interests and found how she could improve his knowledge of Yarner in certain particulars. From casual meetings he made appointments. Then came a Sunday when he and his mother drank tea with Drusilla and her aunt.

Her life was full to overflowing with him, and the day that she saw him was a golden day, no matter how grey the sky; and the days that she saw him not were dormant and of little worth save for thinking on him. He burst into her uneventful life as sight upon the blind; he filled existence with freshness and flavour and joy; but he brought, too, the unrest of doubt and awakened deep self-depreciation. He sharpened up every outlook as love is wont to do; he made her wakefuller, keener, even less morbid; he woke reflections in her that were beyond the reach of his own intellect.

And when she knew, through the speech of his eyes and the tremor of his hand and the backward glance at parting and the quickened step at meeting, that he loved her; when she accepted his little gifts and saw his hand grasp close on her first present of a flower, then life for her took the very substance and golden tremor of the spring forest and was in harmony with the hour. The passion conceived in winter was born in spring, and, as became such a woodland pair, it flowed sweetly to its place, and, like a

crystal rivulet, served to swell an all-embracing river of love, that now ran with much music through this forest world.

The man, entering upon his tenderest experience, was taken out of himself a little and touched, though he knew it not, for under this wakening hour of sap and scent and soft winds, a breath of Drusilla's hopeful spirit dawned in him for a season. He could not feel that all was ill with the larger world while all went so well with his own. He knew, presently, that she loved him, as she knew that he loved her; but the sensation was so delicious, and the experience of their growing understanding and increasing friendship so fragrant to his spirit, that he hesitated to speak. The fruit was ready for his plucking, but he delayed, out of sheer love for its beauty, and also from joy in his power that could win so great a treasure.

He came one day to the forest that he might find her, and, instead, fell in with another woman.

At the entrance to the woods a lake of primroses shone and rippled and foamed away faintly into the shadowy dingles round about. Through the mesh of the birches, where it spread in a close network of brown and dun, now hovered a delicate mist of green—the first radiant spring light of the year. Even in shadow this verdancy was brilliant enough, but where sunshine touched the wood it ran flame bright, fluttered like a torn veil, through the burnished splendours of the birch stems and made the way dazzling.

It seemed that this vernal time was a season of youth, and the lesser things — the rowan, thorn, and birch — answered to the call of the hour, drenched the underwood with manifold young greens, and set sylvan life dancing in adventurous joy and childish beauty beneath the still sleeping, statelier, and mightier fathers of the wood. The grey congregation of the oaks as yet showed no leaf, though their twisted branches were heavily gemmed with agate and amber buds; the pine and spruce were dark; the ash had shaken forth nothing but her tufts of sad-coloured flowers. Here and there the lower arms of a sheltered beech glimmered with translucent leaves, and emerald tents of the larch were unfurled again upon the

hills; but for the most part this was the hour of the young things, and they spread a haze of dim or brilliant green beneath the brown and grey of the forest. It might have been marked of the silver birches how their precocity varied, for here and there a little tree had broken into full life, while its neighbours lingered in their winter wear. On all sides green shouldered green, from the restrained jade of the sallow and rowan—grey against the violent verdure of larch and breaking beech, to the shadowy haunts at stream side where ferns were unfurling their crooks of russet and olive and the golden saxifrages hung in a curtain to the water's edge.

There was a little clump of rhododendron nigh the entrance of the wood, and its flowers were dear to Drusilla. No bud had swelled as yet, but the plants were a conspicuous object and a familiar tryst. Timothy came here now, to find himself alone, but he heard a woman singing not very far off and proceeded in the direction of the song.

Here great cushions of moss rose above the bright growth of the red-belled whortle, where it blossomed and hid the grey, oak-leaf carpet of the wood. But Drusilla did not appear; instead, the keeper caught sight of Audrey Leaman picking primroses.

They had met several times since their quarrel in the woods, and Timothy now understood that the girl might go there when she chose. She knew his secret, but he did not know that she knew it. Yet still she hoped and still she strove to win him. And this she did not out of love, and from no special regard towards him or consideration of those who desired the match, but because she had failed to win him, and such a failure over man hurt her predatory instincts.

"Why for do you pick the things?" he asked. "Who wants 'em?"

"Ah! Who, I wonder? You'd want 'em fast enough if somebody's hands had picked 'em. A flower depends for value on the fingers that hold it, or the breast that wears it. Don't go—talk to me. I'm lonely. Why are you such a stand-offish chap?"

"Am I? 'Tis along of having lived such a lonely life, perhaps."

She expanded in male atmosphere as usual.

"O God, Timothy!" she exclaimed, calling him by his given name for the first time, "the Spring—the Spring—it makes me mad!"

She sucked in the soft air, and her bosom heaved and her eyes shone. Then she buried her face in the primroses she carried and nuzzled them.

"Does it?" he asked. "'Tis different with me. It makes me sane, I reckon."

"You're such a hard, cruel chap," she answered, her heart beating with hope at his amiable manner. "I'm sure no girl's ever wanted to pleasure you more'n I have, and yet—we get no forwarder! You've never so much as asked me to go for a walk with you."

"I'm not your sort, and you well know it."

"I like all sorts."

"Then you're not my sort," he answered. "What manner of use is a girl that likes all sorts? Worse than useless, I reckon—a danger to herself and everybody else."

"Don't you preach—you're a lot too wise, I'm sure. And if I'm wrong, 'tis your place to set me right. You can teach other girls all manner of interesting things—why can't you be nice to me?"

She came close to him, and marked where his eyes penetrated the woods and looked for another figure. There came a sudden, harsh cry, and Audrey saw a magpie swoop down and attack a starling.

"O Lord! look at that!" she cried. "I've been watching that poor bird a long time. He's got a broken wing and can only creep about. Go and rescue him!"

But Timothy refused. The magpie, fastening on the wounded weakling, flung it over and began to peck its head and hammer its life out. The starling screamed pitifully but was powerless.

"If you won't, I will," said Audrey, starting forward. To her delight he stopped her with his hands, and she felt them on her shoulders. She admired them, and noted

how square the fingers were, and how hairy between the knuckles.

"You cruel wretch—it's like murder!"

"I know that starling," said Timothy. "I've been minded to kill it many a day, but with spring there was a chance it might enjoy its life a bit longer. But you see—there's no security for the weak in Nature. She's always on the look-out to stop waste and cut a loss. Better that failure of a bird should make a meal for some prosperous creature than eat more food himself. It's only man keeps his weeds in hothouses."

"It's dying, poor wretch."

"It's dead," he answered.

The starling perished, and the magpie dragged it victoriously away.

"That's what is happening everywhere," said Timothy. "Everything must eat, and the moment a creature gets weak, in these woods, then there's a thousand quick eyes ready to note the weakness and take advantage of it. You either eat or else you're eaten. That's the law of life."

"What a beastly thing death is!" cried the girl. "It seems indecent to see anything die to-day."

"They're dying round you in swarms every day and every night and every hour."

"You've scratched your hand," she said.

"'Tis an old wound."

She considered how she might lure him on a little, and whether indeed it would prove possible.

"I hurt myself a bit ago—tore my stocking and my calf under it." She pulled up her gown nearly to her knee and lifted her foot on a stone. "How's that for an ankle?" she asked, admiring her own slim leg very heartily.

But he had no praise for it.

"Too thin," he said, and shook his head.

"Ah!" she answered, putting down her foot, "perhaps you'll live to know the thin sort are worth a thousand of the others! But I suppose you like the full-blown, cow-hocked fashion of women?"

"No, I don't. There's a happy medium."

His eye still ranged the woods, and now he saw what he wanted to see and prepared to depart.

"There she is," said Audrey; "now you go and tell her I'm too thin. All the same, I don't reckon Drusilla's any fatter than me. Is she, now?"

"How should I know? She haven't asked me to praise her ankles."

"Oh, get along with you!" answered the other. "You're a narrow-minded, silly fool, and you don't deserve to have any women friends, I'm sure. And the end of it will be you won't have any. And I wish you'd never come to these parts at all, for we all got on very well without you."

CHAPTER IX

Now Timothy met Drusilla, and they came together as familiar friends whose amity was based on a long understanding. She knew all that was in his mind about her, but first shyness resulting from the knowledge had passed, and she found this period of waiting for his word not painful; while he, too, delayed to speak because the present was very good to him, and he lacked the experience to know how much more precious the future would be. As yet he guessed not what it would mean to kiss her, and feel her arms round his neck and her breast against his own.

Drusilla sorrowed now for being late, and explained that she could stop but a few moments. Her aunt was ill and she had little leisure.

"I'm afraid the poor old thing won't be here much longer—then what shall I do, I wonder?" she said. But he knew that she must have fathomed the nature of her future.

"The sooner she's gone, the better," he answered. "She's no more use, and she don't get much more pleasure out of being alive, I should reckon."

"Oh yes, she does—on her good days. She's so wasted that the cold torments her, and she can't catch heat, do what I will."

"'Tis very cold and snow about," he said, looking upwards. A north wind shouted through the tree-tops, and the day from being sunny had turned grey.

"Yes. Spring seems to have stopped, and all the young green leaves at the top of the wood are shivering and wishing themselves back in their buds again. 'Tis strange what frail things some of the spring flowers are.

The sorrel, for instance. You'd think the hail-storms and bitterness of these nights would be too much for such a dinky thing. You'd reckon 'twas a creature for summer and sun."

He nodded.

"Just such a fancy as you might have. The times and seasons of things be very interesting, no doubt. 'Tis strange why a tender creature like that should come afore snow is past, and all those great, coarse, lumpy, yellow flowers should wait for August."

"I like ploughman's spikenard, though—don't you?"

"Don't know it—not by name," he confessed. "You'll have to teach me a lot about plants come the summer."

She was doubtful.

"We look at things so different. I can't teach you, but you can teach me."

"No, we don't—we don't look at things different," he answered eagerly. "'Tis only here and there you are too soft about what happens. No use worrying over what can't be helped; but you do, and that's to waste time and energy."

"I know—I'm a silly fool. There's so much to make you sorry in a wood. You can't help pitying many things—useless though it is to do it. They begin so happily and hopefully—all these young creatures so green and fresh now. I seem to know how they feel; but I know the future better than them. I could tell them what's in store if they could hear. Because, when the big trees over their heads come out, all these little ones will be smothered and lose their share of air and light and rain. By full summer they are sad and sickly; and the leaves turn pale in autumn instead of being red and orange and lovely; they get white and ill and wretched. And when the air and sunshine come into the wood when the leaf of the trees is down, all the small things seem to grow hopeful again. And the same happens other ways. Look at the birds and beasts—all after each other—and you after them."

He laughed.

"And my master after me. If I don't shoot the hawks and jays, I'd not be earning my money, though I've no

quarrel with the creatures that have to go on my gallows. But they're in the way and must get out of it. Go on pitying the trees and birds, if it makes you feel better, and pity all that is ruined under rust and canker and blight and rot and death. Pity the poor, crushed worms even; but don't pity the human worms—mind that! Only pitiable things want pity or sink to seek after it. I know the creeping, mean-spirited sort—worms all."

"Oughtn't we to help the weak, then?"

"No," he answered, "not as you do. You're too fond of giving the weak your time and cleverness and thoughts—lumping 'em all in and spending hours to your own loss. You're always helping worms, and what's the end of it? They eat you—alive or dead—they eat you. It's all one. I've marked that fungus sort for years, and I tell you to keep free of 'em and spend your precious time on yourself. And *be* yourself—a healthy, hearty woman. D'you want to go down, and be smothered like these here young trees you pity? No, you want to grow and get your share of good things, like the big ones, and take your place along with the best, and put out flowers and fruit. D'you want to rot away and make food for other plants to batten on? Thrive and flourish I say, and take with both hands and give joy to your equals—them that can feel joy. Why d'you want to waste your time on failures, and lose good hours and days and weeks? 'Tis like lopping off your limbs, so that lesser things than yourself shall suck your share of sunlight and drink your share of rain. Let the dirty little herbs and weeds fight for themselves; and if they can't win, let 'em go under and make way for better things. Take all you can get—and keep it. Nature don't like us any the better for being too generous of her gifts. She gave you your time and your strength to get joy out of, not to squander. That hateful girl, singing over there in the primroses, knows that better than you do." He pointed where Audrey's voice came faintly from far off.

"I'm more selfish than you think, Timothy."

"Are you, Drusilla? I wish you were."

"How pretty she is—Audrey Leaman, I mean."

"So they tell me, but I haven't marked it for myself. I don't like her sort. To me she's more like a naughty, wilful boy than like a girl."

The listener did not know Audrey, and had no inkling as yet of the delicate relation in which she stood to Timothy Snow. He had not told her of the plans in his uncle's mind, and did not intend to do so until Drusilla promised to marry him.

"Her lovely eyes!"

"Shifty! She's a flippity-gibbet of a girl. I pity any man wedded to her."

"She'll be very well-to-do, for she's the only one."

"She'll want curb and snaffle and a heavy hand."

They stood a moment at the edge of the wood where more primroses starred the way and cuddled into the knotted knees and elbows of great tree roots.

"Poor girl—I hope she'll pick the right one—out of so many that are after her."

"Pity again. She's not poor. I must look after your mind on that subject. 'Tis a weakness and not a virtue, Drusilla. Be weak and you're like that thing there: weaker than yourself find you out, and stick their claws into you and trust you to help them along" He pointed to the stump of a dead tree—a ruin whereon the tough and livid lobes of great fungi prospered and thrust out in a cornice, tier above tier. "Not till a good tree was marred could that trash prosper on it," said Timothy. "Keep healthy and you'll escape the clingers and suckers and pests; but once you get weak, they'll be down on you."

"Pity's akin to love," she said, looking into his face tenderly.

He returned her look, and there was a glow in his eyes that belied his answer.

"And so are some other beastly things akin to love. Let's be done with them and see what love looks like without 'em."

She trembled and shut her eyes, for it seemed that the great moment had come. But he said no more then, and did not offer to see her home. Instead he fell into a silence and followed his own thoughts for awhile. Anon

he took a gentle leave of her, and reminded her that she and Miss Widger were to drink tea with his mother on the following evening.

"And if she can't come, you come without her," he said.

Alone, she went her way, but stopped when he was out of sight and sat on a tree root and reflected and wondered. She had more experience of men than Timothy of women, for a man had loved her fiercely and exhausted his resources in the struggle to win her. She remembered his love-making, and contrasted his obstinacy and persistent application with Timothy's delay and calm and overmastering might. His self-control in love resembled his self-control in all else. But the other had not been self-controlled. John Redstone's passion and the devotion of Timothy Snow seemed to Drusilla at the two poles of love-making. One was a head-strong, petulant boy; the other, a restrained and powerful man. Yet she knew what kisses meant and a man's arm holding her to himself. The experiences had been forced upon her and given her no joy, but she remembered them very well and desired to taste them again. She blushed to herself at her thoughts, and felt that the very birds must know her longing.

"Oh, to sit on his lap and cuddle close, close, close to him!" she whispered to her heart.

In the silence she heard Audrey still singing, felt kindly to the girl, and wished that they knew each other.

Presently she went home, wondering how much longer it would be before Timothy spoke.

"He's so terrible interested in everything and even in my stupid ideas, that the moment I start a subject he goes off on it and forgets all about—me," she thought, half ruefully, half smiling.

CHAPTER X

THE time had indeed come for Timothy Snow to speak, and he knew it. To postpone such a task did not belong to his nature, and he appointed the day and hour with himself. Then accident brought him and Drusilla together at a familiar place but a strange time.

He roamed the woods on a still night, thought of his sweetheart asleep, and wondered if she dreamed of him. Then, by the rhododendrons in the darkness, somebody moved, and he turned that way, and cried out and Drusilla answered.

His surprise was extreme, for the girl had appeared to him easily alarmed. She was fearful of firearms, and timorous of fellow-creatures after nightfall. But now he learned that the darkness was a time loved by her, and that often she sought it to soothe troubled thoughts.

On the canvas of night and gloom she projected no horrible phantoms, and at such times even the secret places of the woods awoke no fear for her. Even in childhood, when other little ones, under a natural depression that springs from the dark, would lose their courage and fly from these sombre precincts, her heart beat no quicker and her young spirit suffered no abatement of serenity. She loved the night and the children of the night. Fearless as they were, she moved among them and desired a companion no more than she did at any other time. Her nervous energy was not lowered for the lack of the joy of day; and no fancies or fears sprang upon her out of the nocturnal loneliness. She had declared as much to Timothy, but in his heart he disbelieved her, for he had never yet met a woman who did not fear to go alone through a forest by night.

Now, however, the case was proved, and he exclaimed with wonder.

"'Tis no new thing for me," she said. "You came so quick and I was thinking so deep that I hadn't time to be gone. If I'd stopped where I was you'd have brushed against me in another minute."

"Thinking?" he said. "What about?"

"I've got a good bit to think upon. But I was only thinking of the stars just that minute. A great star hung like a dewdrop to the pine tree bough. Then it slipped away into the tree and I saw no more of it. 'Tis strange that just a leaf or a bough can hide a star, when you think how terrible big the stars really are."

"Ban't you cold?"

"No."

"I wish you'd been thinking a bit upon me."

"Perhaps I was, Timothy."

"Come here," he said. "Come to that old water-trough yonder and pitch along with me for two minutes, then I'll see you home. To think of you roaming out here! And I pictured you asleep with your lovely hair all spread out on your pillow."

She did not answer, but he heard her quickened breathing.

"I was going to talk solemn and serious to you next Sunday afternoon, Drusilla, but it looks as if chance didn't want me to put it off no more. And why not now? I can touch you if I can't see you. Sit here close—close to me. Just this once—very close to me. You can jump up and go away quick if you don't like what I tell you."

The woods sighed gently, invisible around and about. Beneath the trees a nocturnal rustle came and went; afar off an owl cried and another answered it. But these sounds were not loud enough to stay the fierce breath of the man and woman. Each knew all that the other wanted. There was no love-making now.

Drusilla obeyed him and sat close to his side. Then he spoke—in a tone she had not heard until then.

"Come into my arms, for the love of God!" A spark had flashed between them, and the moment in both hearts

was harmonious and perfect and splendid. Never did lovers leap together in a first embrace so overwhelming. Both felt the sublime abandonment; they seemed to step out of themselves for a glorious and naked moment; then each donned the love of the other for a garment and was clothed again.

He picked her up and held her in his lap and showered kiss after kiss upon her face and hair and ears; and she repaid the kisses, and touched his face and neck with her quick hands and stroked his bare head and rubbed her cheek against him. Darkness was on their side; for a long time sheer ecstasy held them while they panted into each other's faces. Then the woman tired and drooped and sighed—a long, happy sigh.

"And this is love!" he said. "To think—and no word spoken—and yet you know I love you with all my soul and strength, Drusilla, and you love me the same way."

"'Tis too good—I shall wake up presently and find I've fallen asleep under my rhododendron bush."

"Please God we'll wake up never, but live as we feel now and go on loving—better, better, if 'tis possible to do it."

"I could sit here, in your dear lap, for evermore—Tim."

"Ah! what a lot that means to me—that short 'Tim'! And you won't be in my lap oftener than I want you to be."

They babbled a while longer, and he exclaimed at their childishness.

"To think two sensible people, like my girl and me, can sit here waiting for dawn with no more sense between us than a pair of squirrels!"

"We can't always be thinking. Let me just feel to-night—just feel to the very bottom of my heart—that I've never been alive before, and that never a moment in the sunshine will ever come up to this starry hour along with my own darling boy. Oh! to go back and remember all my fears and quakes—no, don't be kissing me any more—I must talk. Fears and quakes and—yes, go on kissing—it's life to feel your lips on my skin!—Fears that you was cooling off sometimes, and that you'd never be able

to do with such a stupid creature. And then hopes, too—hopes some days, when I'd pleased you and you seemed more interested, and great hopes when you arranged to meet me again before we parted. But once we parted and you didn't say a word about meeting no more, and my little, silly heart was in my shoon for three days till I saw you again and found you was glad to see me."

"Glad! If you'd only known how you stood between me and everything, how I sighed and fretted and even caught myself out in a crooked word now and then, when days went and I didn't get a sight of you. Why, till I thought—till I began to think you liked me——"

"I tried so hard to hide it!"

"But you couldn't—not from me. And then, when something told me I was all right, I felt 'twas such a glorious state between us that I couldn't dream anything much more glorious, and put off speaking—like the fool I was."

"This is better," she said. "Oh, how I've loved you, and poured out my love for you on my knees of a night, and very nearly fainted sometimes for all I felt. And now I belong to you—to do just what you please with for ever and ever; and I'll hold nought too hard and nought unwelcome that can help to make you happy."

"You darling, blessed thing!" he cried out. "'Tis almost too much when you say such wonderful, beautiful speeches to me. Who am I to have won the likes of you? I can't believe it yet. Maybe I shan't believe it till I've got you wed and safe for ever."

"Safe enough," she said. "There was never any man in the world for me till I saw you, and there never will another."

He strained her to his body, and she clung there with utter joy. Time raced for them, and presently a glimmering light touched the faces that had pressed so close together, surprised their rapture and showed them to each other. The sight awoke new happiness: they fed each on the other's features, and forgot the face of the dawn.

It was nearly four o'clock, and the stars had long since vanished under a universal curtain of cloud. The thin,

cold light crept among the trees, and at a moment when the man and woman were making their hundredth farewell, suddenly, as though a baton invisible had waved a signal to them, there began the aubade of a thousand birds. The matin music filtered through the wood, throbbed at hand and faded away till only the far-off murmur of it came dimly through the passing silence of the nearer songsters. It flowed through the forest—a medley of small, staccato sounds, shrill and sweet, against the loud tenor of the thrush, and the deeper contralto of the blackbird.

Timothy and Drusilla planned to meet again in the evening of that day, and both declared that it would be an eternity before they did so. Then they parted, and she made her cloak a wing as she flew away and it fluttered behind her; while he faced the morning, picked up his gun, rubbed the dew off it, and stood and watched the precious one disappear.

Presently the birds ceased their song for a season and began the business of breakfast at unnumbered nests. The homes in the wood appealed to Timothy with a force unfelt until now. He speculated upon the loves and courtships of the furred and feathered things. It was significant that the idea of love and courtship should enter into his mind, for until that time he had scoffed at the words and held them but a human euphuism for a natural trick. To exalt love and ennoble it and idealise it, had always seemed to the man irrational and stupid. Now his heart was seething, and he moved a lover amid countless other lovers. Soft rain fell and increased, so that the diaphanous glory of the woodland dripped with grey water, and little rills ran down the trunks of the trees. It was warm and the east grew brighter. A cuckoo called near Timothy, and some birds hovered round the keeper and cried angrily because he stopped a moment near their nests. Now indeed the feathered things were not able to fly away before him with indifference, for they had given hostages to fortune and were called to suffer anxieties for them. They screamed and whistled uneasily about the secret places of their nurseries; they cried from

the bough, fluttered in the underwood, or circled aloft about the centre of interest—here hidden in a high pine or low thicket, here, under a veil of ivy, or on the open ground of the marsh.

“Their care is a fine thing!” thought the man, “and now I understand it, and ’tis a natural and fit and right trouble to come to every male creature in his turn. And now I, that shunned it and thought it folly to make life more difficult than a man need—I, that reckoned a wife and family was a fool’s trick and beneath the wisdom of the wise—here am I hungry for them—hungry for them!”

He passed through the sleeping places of the woods to his home, and behind his back the birds took comfort again, sang to their sitting mates or fed their unfledged young.

Presently the rain ceased, and, before six o’clock, the sun sent a flood of liquid gold through the drenched forest; the trees cast down their shadows upon the glittering earth and seemed to awake and stretch their wet boughs and drop nightly cloaks around their feet. The passion of life was in the air, the freshness and savour of young spring made an incense that stole to the deepest, darkest haunts of the woodland. A flame leapt through every glade; happiness rang out from every bough; fresh beauty was born with each trembling leaf and uncurling petal. It was as though the womb of the morning had brought forth a new fire-born, dew-born Dionysus, and the earth went mad for joy. The forest world throbbed and glittered, danced and sang in dithyrambic measures, while all incarnate things joined together—a harmony and glory of glad re-birth.

CHAPTER XI

AMONG the ancient tenement farms that lie upon Dartmoor occurs Dury, beside the eastern arm of Dart. Here dwelt John Redstone and his grandfather, and the younger might still say that he owned Dury, though his tenure grew precarious. The place had come to his father through an uncle, and from his father it passed to him; but now John Redstone, the elder, was gone, and death having played extended havoc with the clan, there remained few near relations to the surviving owner, save his grandfather and his sister. The latter—one Mercy French—lived with her husband and two children at Postbridge, nigh Dury; while old Jacob Redstone dwelt with his grandson at the little farm. He had lived there during the latter part of his son's life also, and when John's father died, Jacob held on and worked the property for his grandson. But now the young man was home again for a doubtful term. His own work, of gamekeeper at Yarner, had ceased, and he found himself upon less congenial employment. Moreover, his days were darkened on more sides than one. He had suffered a great sorrow before leaving Yarner, and now stood face to face with further trouble. During his father's lifetime Dury had been mortgaged, and, at this juncture, there was no money to meet these demands. Lot Snow, who had suffered sharply at the dead owner's hands, was now about to possess the farm, and only a year remained to his present creditor, for Redstone found himself powerless to pay his debts.

With mingled feelings the young man had left Yarner. He might have remained at cost of a little pleading, for his master liked him well, admired his nature and deplored

his departure. Probably some expression of regret for carelessness and a request to be given another chance would have sufficed to keep him as under-keeper at Yarnier; but he offered neither the one nor the other. He was fain to go since Drusilla had refused him. On her the whole passion of a passionate man had centred, and he had come nearer to winning her than he knew. But an instinct as it seemed had bidden her wait. Again and again she refused his entreaties, until at last, reluctantly, he took 'no' for answer, and faced a life that seemed to him ruined past restoration. He was a man of extremes, now dejected beyond measure, now elated above wisdom; and when finally he knew that Drusilla would not be shaken from her refusal, he lost heart about life in general, neglected his work and endangered his position.

Unwillingly Sir Percy Champernowne let him go; but Redstone was not sorry to take his trouble further from the girl who had caused it. He departed to his little farm and worked there; yet fitfully and without heart he laboured, because life was grey and hopeless in his eyes. He felt that he had nothing to work for, and indeed the farm itself was destined soon to slip from his possession, unless some most unexpected accident saved it. He cared little about himself, but his grandfather had to be thought of, and for the old man he entertained deep affection.

On a day in early spring, grandson and grandfather had speech together, and the elder matured a plan.

"'Twas all in vain you met Lot Snow at Longworthy and put right and reason afore him, but maybe he might give heed to my grey hairs."

"And your new clothes," said the younger.

While joy of life had received such hard strokes of late in the case of John Redstone, he stood stoutly up to the blows, for the man's temperament, if choleric, was sanguine. His vitality was not dashed though anxiety had cooled his spirit; an unconquerable nature belonged to him as a precious heritage, and the chastening hand of chance was powerless to alter that. He rose from the stroke and, after some futile rage against Mr Snow had spent itself, he returned by gradual stages to his cheerful self. Now hope,

ever ready to home at his heart, came to him. He set store upon his grandfather's wisdom, and said so.

"You've never done much good for yourself in the world, gaffer, but I'm sure I don't know why you didn't, for a cleverer old man never went on two legs, I'm sure. Yes, you go to him and see what you can do. I won't trust myself to face him again. Butter wouldn't have melted in my mouth last time I saw the swine, but my fingers was itching to be on his fat throat all the while."

"You was very good, I know, and deserved more than you got," said Jacob. "But patience ban't a rich man's virtue, and he's the sort that can't forgive, like they elephants at the beast show. They'll remember a thing for years, and let it gather interest against the doer and pay it back in full, when the chance comes. And that's what Lot Snow be going to do, if we can't soften him. Your father was a smart man, and reckoned a knave to be fair game. He scored off Snow and hit him pretty hard. 'Tis an old story now, but not old to the sufferer. And then your father was going to die laughing at the man, but he didn't, because he'd forgot you, and Snow took care to remind him. However, I'll do what I can, for, be it as 'twill, he haven't no quarrel with me. I never had nothing to do with him."

Old Jacob Redstone presented a pleasant spectacle. He was a very small man, with a face all wrinkled into one laugh. Every line of a thousand lines contributed to the same end. Even seen with his eyes shut a chance beholder smiled to mark so much happiness stamped as a fixture on a fellow countenance; but when he opened them, they were little, bright, black suns, and every converging furrow on brow and temple contributed to their merriment. It seemed that the man had weathered seventy years on Dartmoor to find life the rarest jest offered to mortal. Teeth he had none, but his mouth followed the skull lines and grinned a genial smile. He wore a blue shirt, black leggings, and corduroy trousers. His head was bald, save where a half ring of hair—thin, white, and shining—hung round his nape, like a halo that had slipped down and been caught behind his big ears.

The younger man was five-and-twenty, and of a ruddy countenance. His face and hands were freckled, his hair was red, bright, and curly. He possessed activity, resolution, and great strength. Trouble had worn him rather thin of late, but he was not built to sink under any single tribulation. He could ill endure to wait for a threatened blow, and his impetuous nature rebelled against restraint. In the matter of his crossed love he was bound to endure perforce, and longed very heartily for time to fly, that the pain of disappointment might grow fainter ; but with respect to the mortgage and the loss of his farm, he had stood all that his nature could stand, and intended soon to cut that loss. He would have left the country had it not been for his grandfather, but he knew that to transplant the old man from Dartmoor would be a harsh measure, and he cared not to leave him. A strange affection obtained between them, and John had always liked the laughter-loving ancient better than his own cynical and saturnine parent.

Now came the day when Jacob Redstone prepared to visit Lot Snow. By appointment he went, and his grandson chaffed him as they ate their midday meal before the start.

Jacob wore his black, and had put on a red tie and a white shirt. The cuffs were frayed but clean ; his collar, which cut his shrivelled throat somewhat and caused him discomfort, was also very white.

"I'm sure you'd soften a stone in them clothes," said John, regarding the old man with affection ; and Jacob nodded, for his mouth was full. He chewed upon toothless gums, and feeding was a slow and laborious business with him.

"I shall talk about the future, and offer the man a fair added bit of interest for waiting a bit longer. Things be looking up, and there's brave promise this year. Hay's like to be a masterpiece, and the mangel will sure to make a terrible fine crop. 'Tis always a strong point at Dury—our swedes and mangels. And now you be settled on the place and putting in all your time, who knows what we can't do?"

"I'm afraid 'tis just because I'm my father's son that he won't budge. But tell him I'm patient as a dog, and will meet him any way in my power if he'll only give me a chance to keep my own. Shall you visit anybody else?"

"I want to see Seth Campion—the deaf 'un. He's a very nice man, when you can get through his ear-hole, and an old friend of mine. Then there's Miss Widger—they was saying that her tuber do grow upon her and will soon eat her up. A cruel evil, and who shall blame her for taking a dark view of life? She was quite a cheerful woman in her youth. I'd like for to see her once more, and shall call at the cottage above Yarner on my way home."

John sighed.

"You'll see Drusilla, too, I shouldn't wonder."

"No matter for her. Where there's life there's hope. She'll have to look through a long telescope afore she'll find a better chap than you."

"She has found one. I met Amos Kingdon—head keeper to Yarner—at 'The Coach and Horses' in Ilsington a bit ago, and he'd seen her and the new keeper—the nephew of that God-damned Lot Snow—together in the wood more'n once. And Amos would be glad if I was to go back to-morrow. He don't like this here Timothy Snow. He's too clever for anything, and full of new-fangled ideas, and tells everybody their business. I reckon Drusilla will be properly dazzled, and, of course, he's bound to care for her; so that's as good as done."

"You run on so! Why, that man was brought in over your head for a reason. I heard all about it. He's to wed Leaman's darter—with a ring as will go round Leaman's place and Lot's two farms in the valley. 'Tis all planned and plotted, and the young fellow will do as he's told, you may be sure."

"He just won't," declared John Redstone. "He's not a tame rabbit, whatever else he may be. You mark my words, if they've set him at Audrey Leaman, he'll bolt and go for Drusilla. And who wouldn't? Damn it! I wish I could have got her to see sense."

"You'm too soft, Jacky—like all Redstones," said the

old man. "When I went courting your grandmother—as stood five inches taller than me, but would sit in my lap for all that, bless her body—when I went courting her, she said to me, 'There's nought of the stone about you but your name, Jacob.' A clever thing to say, but she was cruel clever—cleverer far than women be nowadays, for all their schooling. A great place for clever women Okehampton was—where she came from. 'She taught me a lot about life.'"

Presently Mr Redstone finished his dinner and drove away in a pony trap.

"I shall be back along after dark," he said, "in time for supper, if not sooner."

CHAPTER XII

It was upon the day following Drusilla's nocturnal troth that old Jacob Redstone paid his visit to Ilsington and spent a fruitless hour with Lot Snow. He pleaded for his grandson, explained how unreasonable and unjust the contemplated action must be considered, and offered to meet Mr Snow in any way possible, or take any course calculated to save Dury Farm to John. But he failed of his purpose.

"Fore-close I do at the appointed hour, Mr Redstone. And if you knew how many reasons I've got for doing it, you might have saved your wind and your Sunday clothes and your horse's shoes. Firstly, there's the grudge I bear your stock, and if I don't get level with your dead son, I break my oath. Because, when he died and escaped me, I felt rather acid about it, and worried, and had an attack of gout in both feet—all of which was very bad for me. But that's come right, and they laugh longest who laugh last; and I hope and trust, if your son's virtues ever served him to get to heaven, he may know what I'm doing now and feel a thorn in his bed of roses. 'Tis him I'm smiting in this matter—giving as good as I got—and better—because Dury's worth more this year than ever it was."

"My grandson's work."

"Yes—that's how Providence balances up things. You understand I've no quarrel with John. But if a mouse gets under the wheel of the running cart, it squashes. He's got to go. And more than that, I want Dury next year for a very good purpose. I have a private need for it, and must have it."

Jacob argued and strove with all his wits to turn the other,

but he wasted his time. Mr Snow made it abundantly clear that he fore-closed on Dury as soon as the law allowed him to do so. A considerable sum had been advanced, and it was far beyond the present power of the Redstones to find the principal of their obligation.

"It's a matter of business," summed up Lot, "and we needn't have any silly noise and fuss and stage playing about it. I'm doing nothing improper, and I've waited for my money a very long while. The interest's all behind, and it's nothing to me that you say you can pay it all off in six year more, even if that's true. I want the farm for my own purposes, and so enough said."

Old Redstone left him presently, and did not refuse the drop of spirits that Lot offered upon their parting. Then he called at the inn to meet Seth Campion, by appointment, and spent a little while there before proceeding on his way.

One Ned Blackaller kept 'The Coach and Horses,' and prided himself on such a memory that he never forgot a visitor, and remembered even the chance traveller when he returned after absence of years. Mr Redstone was known at the village, and Ned, a tall, thin, and dark man, shook hands and greeted the veteran with friendship.

"Well now! 'tis a longful time since you was this way, my old dear. But going pretty clever, by the look of it?"

"Ess fay, Ned! I'm at the stage of life when nought much happens to a man. I've weathered the worst, and be got to a state that only gives to time. Nothing ever hurts me or takes hold upon me. I shall last up home to the nineties now, and then I shall get the dry rot in me and begin to crumble. 'Tis always so with my race. We go like elm trees—nought to show outside that the crash be coming, till we'm down. And then everybody's terrible surprised."

Mr Blackaller nodded.

"'Tis a common thing. Time may forget you, but death don't. Here's Seth Campion; he's back from Yarnier working for Mr Leaman again now, and that means he haven't got many spare minutes to talk to you."

Campion appeared, and his owl eyes brightened at sight of Mr Redstone. They shook hands, and the elder marked a patch of plaster covering a sore on the other's neck.

"Doctor cut a lump of flesh out of me," said Seth indifferently. "It had to be done, for 'twas poisoning my frame, so he said. A very understanding man. I bled a bucket after, and he bade me drink so much black porter as I could carry in comfort. Which I did do. And, by the same token, I'll have a pint now, Ned."

"Along with me you'll have it," declared Mr Redstone. "And how be your hearing, Seth? Do it mend or grow dimmer?"

He shouted to be heard, and the effort made him choke. Thereupon he laughed, and the tears ran from his eyes; he grew very red, and Blackaller patted him on the back.

"My hearing? 'Tis very near a thing of the past, Jacob. I'll soon be dead to the world. 'Tis a very great hardship for a labouring man. But it don't stand between me and ploughing."

"You was always very clever at that, Seth."

Campion nodded.

"Yes, I believe," he said. "I'm on Farmer Leaman's four-acre meadow now, and if you want to have a tell with me, you'll have to come and walk a bit beside the plough. I can't stop."

They went out together presently, and Redstone left his horse and trap at the inn. Then he followed the labourer to a great field of grass on which piles of farm-yard stuff were disposed in long and regular lines curving across the meadow. Part of this manure was scattered over the land, and part had been already ploughed into it. The ground was being broken for roots. Mr Campion trod laboriously after the team, and his eyes imaged nothing but the tails of two cart mares in front of him. Black and roan they were, and with bent heads they crept along the furrow slowly. The double ploughshare cut each way, and at the end of every furrow Seth turned over his handles, pulled round his horses, and went forward again. The ploughed land shaded off from the last, dark, wet, chamfered ridge of earth to where earlier work, done at dawn, was already drying and fading under the breath of the east wind.

"A good job, and all going very suent!" shouted old

Redstone to the ploughman; and Campion nodded at the compliment and said:

"Yes, I believe."

He heard of the interview with Lot Snow, and exhibited no surprise at the other's failure.

"You don't know so much as me," he said, "else you'd have thought twice afore you bearded the man. Him and my master have a plot afoot to join their places, and Mr Leaman's darter, Miss Audrey, is to wed t'other's nephew, the keeper—him as got your grandson's place at Yarner. 'Tis all planned out, as only such clever men could plan it, and no doubt, in fulness of time, Timothy Snow will offer for the girl and she'll take him. And then young Snow have got to learn his business and be a farmer; and that's why for the old man wants Dury—for his nephew to begin in a small way afore he comes to the big place."

Jacob nodded.

"What a one you are for putting two and two together, Seth!"

"Yes, I believe. And it have got to come about, because Leaman ban't the sort to take 'no' for an answer, no more ban't Snow."

"All clear as daylight. And what about this here young chap as have got my boy's place?"

"Nobody can say nothing against him. A old head on young shoulders, in my opinion. Won't stand no nonsense and won't be led. But alive to his own welfare, no doubt, and isn't going to say 'no' to a purty wife and a good promise of riches."

"What luck some men do have, Seth—eh? To think of all that offered to a young youth. But maybe he'll rise to it and prove himself worthy."

"A very strong man, and rash in his opinions here and there. Not that I've any quarrel with him. I was working up there a bit ago and had some speech with him. Got a great trust in himself and a great distrust of Providence."

"'Tis a way with the young. You have to rise up to your years—or even mine, Seth Campion, afore you begin to find 'tis t'other way round, and Providence can see further into the future than man's wits."

"So I've told him; but he says we make our own Providence, and that's why the witty men get on in the world and the fools hang fire. No doubt there's something in that. And we solid men, that give Providence no trouble—we deserve our regular money and health and strength."

"Every word true! A man like you, Seth, be complete in yourself. You never married; you never kicked over the traces; you never got into no bother with the girls, and never drank, nor played pitch and toss, nor betted nor nothing. A very complete man in a word, and might have risen to higher things but for your great affliction."

"Yes, I believe. But you'll never hear me grumble. I'm like you there: never known to want more than I'm worth, or to say that I'm working for less than I'm worth. Supply and demand be a subject that you can't get round; and I've the largeness of mind to see that I ban't worth more than I fetch."

"The height of wisdom in you!" declared Mr Redstone, "and a terrible rare state for the human mind to reach. I've never heard any man under fifty-five say his wages was enough, or near enough. They think it would be a confession of weakness to admit it; they fear, if they said they was content, their masters would take care they should soon be discontented again. Them as tell you they're getting enough are pretty dead sure to be getting too much, and so men in general keeps their mouths shut on the subject of wages, except to grumble at 'em. But, of course, as a bachelor you don't want what a married man with a lot of childer must have."

The other shook his head.

"I don't go along with you there, Jacob. Why for should the lucky ones with wives and childer have more than such as me? Along of my affliction and small money I could never get a well-favoured woman to look at me, though I offered in four cases while I was between the age of thirty and forty-two. And such an eye I had for a bowerly lass that I never could tinker up to a plain one. So I went without, and missed all the blessing and comfort of a woman in the house, and all the learning we get from them, and all the pride of handing on my

own pattern to a man-child. You see, I'm a thinking creature and turn these things over in my mind. And when all's said, I deserve my savings just as much as any married man and the father of ten, find him where you will."

"I've nothing to say against that, Seth, and you'll keep out of the workhouse at the end and be a credit to us all. And I hope we shall see you to Dury afore long to have bite and sup and a walk round. You won't know the place, for 'tis a matter of years since you was up over."

"I'll come," declared Mr Campion. "I'll come of a bank holiday presently, or else of a Sunday. How long do you count to be there?"

"Nine months."

"And what'll you do after?"

"Us haven't turned it over yet. But my boy be very like to go back to gamekeeper's work."

"And if I know anything, he'd be very welcome again at Yarner. Amos Kingdon likes him a lot better than he likes Timothy Snow. In fact he've got no use for Snow, and think's he's a bit too full of his own cleverness. And Sir Percy did use to think well of your grandson, too. 'Twas only along of a few faults and wishing to oblige Lot Snow that he let Redstone go. And if John had but stood out and asked to stop, Sir Percy would have caved in and let him stop."

"Too proud for that, Seth. He's a man as sweet as honey sometimes, and as gentle and as kindly as a nice child—my grandson is. But he's got a terrible sharp sense of justice, and if he thinks the law's being strained, or a man be working against him outside right and reason and honesty, then he gets wicked in a minute."

They parted presently, and Campion renewed his promise to visit Dury, while Mr Redstone, returning to Ilsington, harnessed his horse and set off to visit Miss Widger, at her home above Yarner. He did not reach the cottage, however, for Jenny Widger met him at the moor-edge on her way into the village.

"There now!" he said, "if I wasn't on my road to you! Coming for a bit of a tell and a cup of tea I was."

"And no man would have been welcomer at another

time," she answered, "but the days for telling and tea-drinking be long since over in my poor life. I be eaten up by inches along of my canker—a living death, you might say—and as if that wasn't enough, I've just heard of a thing as have made my head spin like a chimney-cowl. In a word, my niece be tokened."

"That nice girl as Johnny cared about? Well, I'm properly sorry for his sake as she couldn't take him, for they'd have made a very happy pair, so far as we can judge of such things. But we can't plan these affairs. And who be the man? Just the opposite of my boy, no doubt."

"'Tis not a matter to take so calm," declared Jenny Widger. "'Tis a very far-reaching, tragical thing, and for my part I'm a lot put about over it."

"Why for?" asked the old man,

"Because it means trouble. Never mind about that. Ban't our business, and presently I be going to try and find my own duty in the matter. It shan't be said as I had any hand in it. And whether or no, Drusilla didn't ought to think of marrying so long as I be alive. I shan't be above ground much longer, and 'tis a very indecent thing, in my opinion, as she could lend her ear to a man, with my sufferings always at her door."

"You be looking fairly game," declared Mr Redstone, but the woman denied it.

"'Tis your failing sight," she said. "And I see you be bent pretty well two-double since I met you last. They'll never straighten your corpse; and as for me, I can't let down my food, and I have the awfulest dreams of a night that ever happened. God knows why they'm sent, and if 'twasn't His work, you'd say 'twas indecent and cruel improper that an old maiden woman should have 'em, for I always get the same frightful nightmare four nights out of five; and 'tis that an evil man be running away with me in his arms. I wake up yowling sometimes, and feel I could scratch my eyes out for shame."

"You did ought to tell the doctor about it."

"The doctor! Mischief take the doctor! I'm sick of the doctor—all talk and long words that he uses to hide

his own silliness. I wouldn't tell him about it—a young thing like him. I've got my self-respect, and the sound side of my face blushes yet, I can tell you."

She talked without ceasing for ten minutes, then remembered her errand and prepared to leave him. She spoke of nothing but her sufferings, and did not enquire concerning Mr Redstone's fortunes or reveal the least interest in them. He had not seen her for more than a year, and observed how greatly she was changed in body and mind.

"The dismal sight of a dying creature who can't take it quiet, but be running about shrieking like a stuck pig," he told his grandson when he returned home at nightfall. "In a word, John, I've not enjoyed myself very much to-day, and I ban't the bringer of good news but quite the contrary. Lot Snow is a man cast in a very harsh pattern, and I'm sorry to say there's nothing gained by my visit. I've done my bestest, but I might so soon have asked the river to spare the drowning lamb, as that man to harken and give us the chance to free Dury. He's got his knife in, and he's going to drive it home."

CHAPTER XIII

TIMOTHY SNOW and Drusilla Whyddon sat together on a mound of rocks lifted high above a valley. It was Sunday, and they were together upon the Moor. Beneath them leagues of dead fern spread a delicate roseal grey upon the bosom of the waste, and scattered granite broke it, where boulders and rock masses were piled and flung in wild confusion. The stone shone blue by contrast with the withered bracken, and the quality of the air made it lustrous although the day was dull. Little cob-web-coloured thorns dotted the sloping hillside, and in their midst was the mark of vanished man, where sunken stones drew a circle on the heath. All distances were dimmed by the north wind; Cosdon's remote arch bent like a cloud on the horizon, and huge Hameldon was also sunk in haze, where it towered to the west.

A stream ran in the valley bottom, and beyond it earth climbed by wooded coombs upward to grassy hills, where the fires of the greater gorse were kindling.

"I always think the Moor is lonesome and empty after Yarner," said Timothy's betrothed. "There things seem close to you and friendly; up here all is cold and strange and far off."

"Good for a change," he answered. "I like Dartmoor. It braces up your nerves. I feel Yarner stuffy and soft sometimes. Then there's nothing like a good stinging from the wind on the tors. In the woods you can't get away from us humans—at least I feel it so, and the better the woodman's and keeper's work, the more you see of it; but up here, save for one thing, there's not a glimpse of humans between us and the edge of the hills yonder."

"I see no sign but the farmhouse roof in the trees."

"No—not that. I didn't mark that. I'll be jealous of your eyes presently, Drusilla. 'Tis the round ring down there—stones the 'old men' set up. That's what I was looking at. They're held to be very interesting—those old stones—and there was a lot more of 'em about in the past; but the folk up here have taken most of the best for their own uses."

"We're quits, Timothy," she said, "for I hadn't seen it. So your eyes are as quick as mine. Indeed, they are many times quicker."

She had reclined at his feet with her back against his knees, and now she rose and knelt and put her arms round his neck.

He kissed her, and was shaken from his didactic talk for a moment or two, but the ruling passion could not be balked for long by any other. After a few endearments the young man began to air his opinions once more, though he stroked Drusilla's cheek the while.

"Yes, I'd have the circle away from this great view, because I've a fancy sometimes to turn my back on everything that marks man. I like now and again to see only the wild earth untouched by us. The earth's the thing. Don't we go to it for all? Why, we couldn't have the air we breathe but for the earth. Don't we tire ourselves out every day standing on our feet? And then we've got to get closer to it, and lie on it with our whole bodies to gather the strength to go on living."

"So 'tis," she agreed. "The tired man and the sad man and the stricken man—all cry to lie on it and hide their faces in it."

"They do; and I can easily fancy things falling out so that a man might cry to go under it altogether and make an end. And for a man so full of life as I am now, that's a pretty good thing to grant. But I've had more luck than ever I deserved."

"I love to hear you say so, though 'tis far ways from the truth," she declared. "I'm not good enough nor clever enough for you, and never shall be one nor t'other."

"You've taught me a mighty lot, and will teach me

more," he answered. "I was too much of an own-self man before I fell in love with you, Drusilla. But you've enlarged my mind, and made me take more interest in other people."

"Yet you're all against sympathy and pity and all that?"

"And always shall be; but fellowship I welcome. I'm open to fellowship with any honest man, but there's that about me that chokes men off fellowship. 'Tis my way of thinking above them. They don't understand, and so fancy I'm a hard man."

"You're not hard really, Tim."

"Yes, according to the flabby way most people think and feel, I'm hard. To hate sympathy and pity is hard. But I can't help it, and I know I'm right: I know the flabby folk all end by getting left behind and going down. For sympathy don't help you to keep your self-respect, and pity do help you to lose it."

They talked on, and one might have noted impartially how his larger mind drifted again and again to the abstract, while the loving girl's thoughts and speeches brought him back to the actual, with her arms round his neck and her dark, grey eyes beaming into his.

They abandoned abstractions presently and spoke of their love and marriage and the life after marriage.

The subject absorbed them for an hour, then they strolled along together for a mile or more. Timothy took leave of Drusilla presently. He often saw her to her home, but rarely entered it, for Miss Widger disliked him and his opinions, and he shrank from irritating her.

Now the lovers parted under Hey Tor, and an event very unexpected overtook the man. Drusilla was hardly out of sight when young Snow found himself accosted by a stranger. He puzzled for a moment to recollect where he had met the other before, but could not remember. Then John Redstone introduced himself, and Timothy called back to his mind a vanished Sunday when he had caught a glimpse of Redstone from the parlour window of his uncle's house at Ilington.

"My name's John Redstone," explained the master of Dury, "and I was coming down to you in Yarnier woods,

because I very much wished to have a tell, and heard you was a clever sort of man. Then I saw you out 'pon the Moor with Drusilla—I call her so because I've knowed her for years—long afore you did, and she's very good friends with me, and no doubt you've heard her name my name. I was second keeper to Yarner afore you came there, and I can tell you all about myself if you care to know it."

"I've heard about you."

"If 'twas from Drusilla, you heard truth; but if 'twas from Lot Snow you didn't. He's got his knife into me pretty cruel, and 'tis on that 'count I be come to see you and beg for the favour of your opinion."

"I've heard nothing against you—unless 'twas from Amos Kingdon, head keeper at Yarner, and he thinks a mighty deal of you. 'Tis only that you was a bit lazy now and again."

"Leave that. Man to man I want you to lend me a hand if you know how, and there's no reason against that I can think on. You're one of the lucky ones, and so might give a chap like me the benefit of your sense. I reckon you be in high favour with your uncle, and why not? But he's a very hard man, let me tell you, Timothy Snow. He's treating me very bad, and I resent it with all my might, but all the same I want to know if there's any way I can come round him."

"Why for should you want to?" asked the other. "What d'you want to come round him for? 'Tis a mean way to set to work. Who's right and who's wrong? That's the question."

They walked side by side upon an ancient tram-way that wound out of Hey Tor quarries, and John Redstone explained his position and the attitude of Lot Snow to Dury Farm.

"You see," he summed up, "the man would be inside justice to snatch it, since under law 'tis his next Michaelmas, but against that he's not inside fairness to do so. He's striking my dead father through me, and that's not a sporting nor a decent thing. But I'm very ready to bear the burden of my father's mistakes, for he was one

of the right sort; only I claim that 'twill be too harsh a course altogether to take my farm away from me."

"'Tisn't your farm no more after Michaelmas. He's not taking it away: 'tis his own. You're asking my uncle to give you Dury. Why should he?"

"That's just how he talks! Can't you see it with my eyes? 'Tis my ewe lamb—all I've got or ever shall get. And he's rich in land; and I offer and undertake full and generous payment for years and years. I offer far more than the money he lent father. What would you do? Would you have me out and keep to the letter of the law for an old spite? For that's how it stands. He's got no quarrel with me. 'Tis the dead he's thinking to be even with."

Timothy considered.

"That's a fool's trick and not like him. But to give you his farm would be a fool's trick, too, of course."

"I don't want him to give it. I only ask to redeem it with interest."

"Maybe he doesn't see how you can."

"That's my business. He won't see, because he don't want to see. He's got his ideas. He wants the farm for a certain purpose, he told my grandfather, though the purpose he didn't name."

"I wish I could help you," said Timothy, "but it isn't possible. He wouldn't give ear to me. For that matter, I'm going to the man with news this very day that won't make him very friendly to me. You've got to choose in this world between being selfish and being a fool. Anyway, I haven't seen no middle course yet. My uncle's chosen long ago, and you know which he is."

"Right!" answered the other. "If that's so, we know where we are. I'm built that way, too."

"Then the sparks have got to fly," declared Timothy; "but I warn you not to be hopeful. He's harder than you, because he's older and stronger—stronger here." He touched his forehead. "I'm not doubting your wits," he added, "but Lot Snow's far above common men in his own way. I don't fear the man, because my interests and hopes are out of his reach, and don't

depend on cash or any of the things he makes his god. But you're in a different position towards him—at his mercy, so far as I can understand. And it's not much fun being at the mercy of a man who hasn't got any."

Redstone debated with himself on this saying.

"I'll grant his great brain-power, but brains ban't everything."

"Yes, they are, when they keep inside the law. If you break the law, the law will jolly soon break you. Your father broke the law, and you reap the punishment."

"Then you come down to bed rock. I try to keep off that where I can, because I've got a hell of a temper; and when my temper gets the bit in its teeth, I let everything go. But if he won't listen to reason, he may have to listen to unreason!"

"Then you're dangerous in the eyes of the world, and my old man may have to seek help against you. I'd be your friend for that, for I'm dangerous too; but my interest lies on the other side."

They spoke at some length, and the impression created in Timothy's mind was one of interest and even friendliness. He recognised in Redstone a man who might practise what he himself preached. John was not very intelligent, but his natural instincts appeared to move without trammel, and he showed an impatience of convention and common opinions that attracted the elder man. But Redstone, while not ashamed of his fiery temper, yet admitted the possession of it dangerous, and explained how he endeavoured to hold it in check.

At the end Snow advised him not to be sanguine in the matter of the farm.

"You've run up against one that's bad to beat," he said. "I've got my own little battle to fight in that quarter, as I tell you, and I know already that Lot Snow won't take 'no' for an answer if by hook or crook he can twist it or beat it or bluff it into 'yes.' He's got to go under to me, because, against me, he has no weapons whatever; but your case is different. In your fix he'll have his way. The

strong will be strong, and if their strength comes up against weakness, the weakness has got to go down."

"I'm strong, too."

"Not in this case. You're weak, or your case is, which amounts to the same thing. Your good is another man's ill in this matter; and he's not going to put your good afore his own. 'Twould be a generous and a kindly deed to let you buy back your place, or let you try to do it in your own time, but he's not generous nor yet kindly. And in this matter very few men would be, I reckon."

"You don't see the justice of my side?"

"There's no justice in it. You're asking for mercy, and you won't find me backing you up in that."

"I don't want mercy from him, and I'm sorry you can't see it my way, for I say 'tis justice that I stand for."

"Don't let your conscience come between you and what you want, any way," advised Timothy. "I'm very hard set on trying to get men to think for themselves, and to face the trials and difficulties of life in their own strength and by their own natures. And in my opinion conscience is a fraud and leads us far astray. If you think you've got right on your side, then act according. Here's 'The Coach and Horses,' so you'd best come in and have a drink. I can't give you no advice, and I wouldn't if I could, but I reckon we think alike in a good few things, though we've come to do so by different roads."

"'Tis funny you should feel so," answered Redstone; "and I like the way you talk, because you haven't got no copy-book cant, seemingly, and reckon the world's to the strong. Well for you it is—since you're one of the strong yourself! I hated you like the Dowl when first I heard you'd got my billet; and worse—far worse I hated you when I was told you saw a good bit of Drusilla Whyddon. But there 'tis—you be one of the strong, I suppose, and the battle goes to them, and the booty likewise."

The other enjoyed this praise, and opened a little of his heart.

"I'm here on that very errand, and don't mind telling you. My Drusilla liked you very well, as a friend, and made me feel kindly to you long before to-day; but she

didn't find love wake in her for you, so it was in vain to pretend it. But she's tokened to me; and now I've got to let my uncle know it; and as he had very different plans for me, no doubt there'll be a bit of a clash."

"And you'll come out top."

"Yes, I shall, because I've got the whip hand. He's old-fashioned, and still thinks the old generation can make or mar the rising one; but the time is past for that: we go our own way now, and we're better taught than our fathers were, and won't be interfered with."

"I wish 'twas so with me. But I'm terrible ignorant. I know what I want, and that's about all."

"So do most; but the difference between cleverness and ignorance is that the clever ones get what they want, and don't waste time wanting what they can't get; and the fools cry for the moon so often as not, and go on crying for it to the end of their stupid lives."

John nodded.

"That's to say you're one of the clever ones," he answered; "for you've got what you wanted, and, now I know you, I see how it was." He referred to Drusilla, but his listener was not aware that he did so.

They reached 'The Coach and Horses,' and Timothy, in a very superior mood, gave his new acquaintance a drink.

"As becomes the day," said Ned Blackaller, "we be talking about the difference betwixt right and wrong, Mr Snow; and though you'd say offhand there couldn't be much doubt in any Christian mind on that score, yet 'tis wonderful how the brain may be caught in a mesh of words, like a bird in a net. And then you can be brought to question all things; and here's Fred Moyle making even the Ten Commandments look as if they'd got the rot in 'em—a doubtful piece of work for a policeman."

CHAPTER XIV

"WE was talking about Nature," said Amos Kingdon of Yarner. "As a keeper, man and boy, for forty year, I ought to be allowed to know something about it, and these men here—Snow and Redstone—will bear me out that what I don't know about Yarner ban't worth knowing."

"Yarner's one thing and Nature's another," said Timothy. "You know a lot about both, however."

"It takes all sorts of trees to make a proper wood, and all sorts of people to make a world," declared Mr Kingdon; "and trees be like people, and Nature plays tricks with them same as it does with us."

"Nature don't bear in mind our likes and dislikes," said Ned Blackaller, "and, to put it clearly, you can't understand Nature unless you begin by allowing 'tis a fool."

"From our point of view, Ned," corrected Timothy. "But we ain't everybody."

"Ban't we? Who else is there?" asked the publican. "We're taught as man be the lord of creation, but Nature don't take no more stock in us than the weed by the road; and 'tis along of marking that fact that I be doubtful of a good many things."

"Hear! hear!" said Moyle. The policeman was off duty, and sitting in his Sunday clothes with other men; but now he rose and went out of the bar. There was a pause, and Kingdon looked at Timothy and shrugged his shoulders.

"An unforgiving man is Moyle," said Blackaller. "He won't stop in the same room as you, Timothy Snow. He says you insulted him something shameful."

The keeper laughed.

"Silly creature! I turned him out of Yarner, because he was trespassing. He knows he was wrong, and isn't man enough to admit it. He's got more brains than pluck, seemingly, else he wouldn't have cheered you, Ned, when you said that you're doubtful of many things."

"If 'tis granted that Nature's a fool," said Blackaller, who unconsciously loved metaphysics, "then what about the God of Nature they tell about? He's above our wits, same as Nature is, and He does things—scores of 'em—that no reasonable man would dare——"

"But why, but why?" cried Kingdon. "Why, I ax you? Because there's one rule for God and one rule for man. He makes our rules and lets us know 'em; and He makes His own rules and don't let us know 'em. But I lay my life He keeps 'em!"

"He works on a plan above our wits to follow—you mean that, Amos?" asked the publican.

"Of course He do; and 'tis us would be the fools to doubt Him without knowing His purpose. Would you blame schoolmaster for not making the meaning of pounds, shillings, and pence clear to a year-old babby? No, you wouldn't. Then why do you blame God A'mighty for not making His meaning clear to us? We haven't got the wit to hold it—any more than this here half-pint mug could hold a quart."

"What d'you say to that, Ned?" asked Timothy. "That's how Mr Kingdon, here, always talks to me. Don't you, Amos?"

"You've got a lot of wrong ideas, and are proud of 'em," answered the head keeper. "But I've hopes of you yet, because you'm in earnest and not light-minded. But you're far too stiff in your own opinions and too vain, Timothy—much too vain. You'll change, however, afore your hair's grey—I feel no doubt of that."

Blackaller had been considering.

"'Tis not thought a right or a reasonable thing to pass an opinion on God, and yet, since He's put brains in our heads, I can't see why for we shouldn't use 'em in reverence upon our Maker," he declared.

"'Tis high treason to say a word against the king, who's

but a man," said Kingdon, "then how much worse to cast a shadow on the perfection of the Almighty Name?"

Timothy spoke.

"Parson said in his sermon last Sunday that, after wars are a thing of the past, man will start a better fight and conquer himself. Now would you say that God be on the side of wars still, as of old, or on the side of peace?"

"He's on the side of right—whether it be peace or war—and that's enough for us," declared Mr Kingdon.

"'Tis a pity all don't feel content like you," replied Blackaller, "but many cannot. You hear such a lot of people say that God will be pleased if they do this or that, and read His Almighty Mind easier than the newspaper; and then they turn round and tell us, who be deeper, doubtfuller sort of men, *our* duty, and get cross with us if we don't see it with their eyes."

"We do know a lot of His mind, because He's willed we should do so," answered Kingdon. "'Tis no impertinence in us to tell those who are in the dark where they can get a light. You chaps don't mean to be wicked, no more than a child playing with matches do mean to set the house afire; but you'll set your own houses afire afore long, for you be playing with hell-fire, in my opinion; and them as might have the light but refuse it, will suffer most for their wilful wickedness."

"And what might your opinions be on the matter?" Timothy asked John Redstone.

But the younger only laughed. He had not been listening.

"Haven't got none," he said. "'Tis waste of time. When God stirs Hissself on my account and brings me a bit of luck, I'll very soon throw up my hat for Him. Everything falls awry with me, and the harder I fight to get a bit of good out of life, the less comes my way."

"'Tis a very narrow point of view to judge your Maker according to His treatment of you, John," said Mr Kingdon; "and when you was at Yarner you held properer opinions, if my memory serves me. But then things fell out crooked with you, and now you won't trust no more and go over to the enemy."

"You must judge for yourself, and 'tis no sense purring

over God for being kind to somebody else, if He's unkind to you," answered Redstone.

Snow applauded the sentiment.

"That's reason and sense," he declared; "and since 'tis impossible for our wits to explain why the man we think good comes to grief and the man we think bad has all the luck, then the only fair thing is to keep an open mind and not take sides. The world's run by chance, in my opinion, and there's only one person in it who is properly anxious and keen and watchful and hungry for a man to get on and have a good time and prosper and suck the best the world can give: and that's himself."

Mr Kingdon shook his head.

"The Board Schools have got a cruel lot to answer for," he replied, "as I always well knew they would have. A pretty world 'twill be, come presently!"

"Cheer up, Amos," said Redstone; "'twill last your time and a bit over, and whether or no, there'll be no better or kindlier breed of man in the future than you, whatever you may think or believe. Would you punish man or mouse, however naughty they'd been, if you could help it? Not you—too much heart you've got!"

The subject changed, and Timothy left 'The Coach and Horses' and went his way.

He considered Redstone and approved him. He perceived in him a man built after his own mental pattern, and likely to make a lasting friend. He lacked penetration to perceive the fundamental differences of temperament that separated them, and he did not guess that the other had passed through fires whose fierceness he had never felt. That friendship might subsist between them appeared possible from John's mild and easy attitude; but for the moment Snow forgot the circumstances, and ignored the prime fact that Redstone loved the woman he was going to wed. He considered the point presently; then, judging the other's nature by his own, supposed, that since Drusilla cared not for Redstone, he had ceased to care for her. His attitude of mind to the younger man was egoistic and selfish to the verge of unintelligence. He saw in Redstone

promising material, and the emotion of the propagandist awoke with respect to him. The larger and freer nature of the younger was concealed from him, behind Redstone's ignorance; and Timothy did not guess that, when practice rather than preaching was the matter, the pupil possessed characteristics likely to carry him farther than his master. But a magistral attitude he assumed, and hoped that he might help Redstone to larger understanding.

Then he dismissed John before the great business of the day, and stood in the presence of his Uncle Lot and told him that he was betrothed.

The older man listened patiently, and suffered his nephew's story without interruption. He felt great surprise, but waited for Timothy to make his statement.

Then he spoke mildly.

"I've heard you, and now 'tis your turn to hear me. I'll show you to yourself, young shaver—and that's a thing you haven't seen yet, for all your sharp eyes. Just run your mind back a bit and consider what I've done for you and what I mean to do. But look how you answer me. I'll not talk about kinship, or friendship, or obligation, or anything of that, because you belong to the clever young generation as haven't no use for such ideas; but I'll just stick to justice and no more. You be so terrible great on justice that you can have patience to listen to what justice means, I daresay. Well, you drive ahead so fast that you quite forget who 'twas greased the wheels and put the horse in and set the reins in your hands. I'm taking no undue credit, mind. I'm not saying you couldn't have done without me; but I am saying, as things fell out, that you couldn't have done half or a quarter so well without me as you've done with me. And I've been glad to do it, and never asked for no return but quite the contrary. I've given and given."

"Yes, but not to please me—to please yourself. You want your land and Farmer Leaman's all to be lumped in together, and you make your plans according and fit me in to them, as if I was no more than the brick in a wall. You look at all men only as useful or useless from your own point of view, and you'd mould and arrange my life

just to fit your own schemes without any thought as to whether 'twas seemly and proper."

"And was my point of view taken without any thought of you? Was it to leave you out of the business, to fit you with a fine wife and make you my heir? Just look over what I had planned, and then ask yourself whether in right and reason and common-sense I wasn't justified in expecting you to see it with my eyes. To be left rich and prosperous with a pretty, clever wife and the regard of all sane people—that's not to be a brick in a wall—and you are headstrong and foolish to talk so. Just turn it over, nephew Timothy, and understand that I won't accept what you tell me, and won't allow it nor yet approve of it. I protest with all my might and main, and say this: that a thing that's gone such a little way can easily be altered. Stick to justice—I ask no more than that—and you'll find that if you're just to me, you'll feel this sudden fancy must be given up. I made my meaning clear long before you saw this young woman, and you knew that to court her was not fair to me."

"You don't believe that, for all you say it," declared Timothy. "You can't believe it. 'Tis nonsense, and nothing else. You wanted me to marry a certain girl, and I'd got no use for her, and there was an end. You know her and you know me, and if you'd given the question a thought, or looked at it with the cleverness you look at all other questions, then you'd have seen in a flash it couldn't be. Never was two people less planned for each other."

"On the contrary, that's what I know and you do not. If you'd paid me the respect and justice to consider what I wished, and had seen Audrey Leaman and studied her character and listened to her sense, and even her nonsense, you'd very soon have found out that she was the cleverest girl in these parts—and more than clever—large-minded. In fact, she's just what you want to leaven your own opinions. A better match couldn't have been planned, apart from all the thousand-and-one reasons for it. She will lighten your heaviness, and make you take other people more serious and yourself less serious. She'll enlarge your mind and soften your judgment, and you'll steady her here

and there, and show her life's got a serious side, and ban't all junkettings and revels and love-makings. A comelier pair couldn't have been thought upon; and I'll say this—for your ear only, and trust you as a decent man to keep secret—Audrey's all right, and have the sense to like you very well. The rest bides with you. I choose to pay no heed to what you've told me. 'Tis a mistake you've made, and the sooner it's rectified and swept behind you, the better. You see I'm not vexed nor troubled—only regretful you should have been wasting your time and endangering your future. And as to this other girl——”

“I beg you won't treat me like a child any more, Uncle Lot; 'tisn't worthy of you, and makes me feel silly. You know I didn't come here with the great news that I love a woman, and that she loves me, just to hear you say 'tis all nothing, and must be put behind me and forgotten. I'm not that sort. I never thought I should have fallen in love—in fact, I was used to despise it; but now I know 'tis the greatest thing in the world—above all wisdom and all the rest of it; and so it makes me a thought wild to hear you calmly say I must give up Drusilla and take Audrey to please you. And I to say that it is justice! Why, you know right well I'm too sane a man to be put off the object of my life by such twaddle.”

“Justice is not twaddle, and you would have been the first to allow it a week ago, before you took this step. You are under very great obligations to me, Timothy, and I refuse to believe that you are going to ignore them. No, no—I'll hear no more of this. I won't remember a word of it. I'll do what you will wish me to do a fortnight hence, and forget all about it. Patience made alive am I—never so patient before, though, and not likely to be again. You go home and walk in your woods, and, while you're about your business, try to see your duty to me—to the man who has made you, and wishes nothing but kindness to you, and asks in exchange for all that he will do—what? Nothing but justice, and the bare compliment of being met half-way in the most handsome of proposals. Not another word. You be off and weigh this thing out to the last grain. And don't play the

fool with such fortune as seldom falls to the lot of mortal man."

"'Tis no use, uncle; you can't override me like that, or fright me with frowns. I've promised to marry Drusilla Whyddon, and nothing on earth will come between us, and there's no reason on earth against it—least of all justice to you or any other. And as to marrying for money—ask the men who do it what 'tis like all through. They'll whisper a thing or two! Everybody wants their money's worth, and none more than a rich wife."

Mr Snow maintained his urbanity and self-control to the end.

"I repeat, I will not accept this or consider it for a moment, nephew Timothy. Justice is the first and foremost reason why such a thing is impossible now. You'll see it the moment you turn your mind properly on to it. I feel no fear on that score; and, what's more, the girl will see it too. 'Tis any odds you've hid away from her a few things that she ought to know. However, enough said. Good-bye—unless you'll bide to supper along with your aunt and me."

But he offered his hand, and Timothy shook it and prepared to depart.

"I've told you," he said. "You had a right to know, for one life is dependent on another, though not in the way you mean. If you hadn't got me the work at Yarner, I should never have fallen in with Drusilla; and then the best thing that has ever happened to me would not have done so. So I thank you for precious things, though not the precious things you planned for me."

"Go," answered Lot, "and get these cobwebs out of your brains."

He called his sister when the man had left him, and exhibited to her an asperity hid from his nephew.

"That fool's got hitched to a girl—the last difficulty I expected. Somebody by the name of Drusilla Whyddon."

"I'm afraid your luck's out in that matter. He's not the sort to be changed," she said.

"Isn't he? I say he shall be changed," answered the old man. "This shan't go through if I can prevent it."

CHAPTER XV

LOT SNOW, as one who had not known love, failed to appreciate intelligently the position in respect of Timothy and Drusilla. He argued that the man came to Yarnier free in heart, and that, having learned his benefactor's purpose, in all right and reason he should have become a consenting party. Timothy's conduct was inexcusable in Lot's opinion, seeing that there had been no prior attachment when first the keeper came to his new work. To have fallen in love with somebody else, when he might have pleased so many people by falling in love with Audrey Leaman, struck Mr Snow as vexatious and insolent and wrong-headed. There was no excuse for it. He felt, therefore, that in all future dealing with his nephew, sentiment need not actuate him. The younger had not only flouted his ambitions and desires, but even gone out of the way to frustrate them. Hence it was not to be expected that Lot would tolerate such rough usage without a counter-stroke. The circumstance clouded his temper and hardened his heart. He considered how best he might break Timothy's engagement, and yet win to his purpose; and obscured by a rare resentment, foreign to his usual clear judgment and cool temper, he told himself that, whether Timothy wedded Audrey Leaman or not, he should never marry the girl he had now chosen with such cynical indifference to his uncle's wishes.

He was glad, however, that he had preserved self-control in presence of Timothy, and felt satisfied that he had not committed himself, or indicated his future line of action, if the other persisted in disregarding his desires. The old man felt free to proceed; and since, with one of Timothy's

temperament he judged that little time was likely to be wasted, Lot Snow prepared to act upon the first opportunity. A deed occurred to him in the hours of the night that succeeded his nephew's visit, and two days later he took the first step. It was absolutely destructive of the younger's hopes, and he spared no pains, patience, and subtlety to make it so. Another man might have hesitated and shirked the infliction of such infinite pain; a different order of mind, familiar from experience with love, might have suspected the plan of action vain in itself. But Lot was unhindered either by humanity or experience. He went to the fountain head of the matter with directness; and the accident of a nature specially pervious to this particular attack, sufficed to crown his enterprise with immediate success.

Lot Snow knew Jenny Widger, and called upon her about tea-time on his way back from Manaton.

He hitched his horse to the gate and tramped heavily down the brick-paved path, beside which columbines, stocks, and gillyflowers began to bloom. He knocked, and Drusilla came to the door. She knew the visitor well enough by sight, but he did not know her. He guessed, however, that she was Jenny's niece and explained his errand.

"I was very sorry to hear that Miss Widger's face had got a good bit worse of late, and that she was suffering a parlous deal of pain. So, chancing back from Manaton I thought as I'd call and pass the time of day. Her relations was very well knowed to me in the past, though they be mostly gone home now, I believe."

The invalid felt surprised at such a visit, and, before she comprehended its meaning, had invited Mr Snow to stay and drink a cup of tea. But when the real significance of Lot's appearance occurred to her, the woman's sensitive spirit began to smart, and she regretted her hospitality.

At first, however, she found herself in no little excitement and flutter at the compliment. She set Drusilla about preparations for the meal, and gave Lot a lengthy and exact description of her physical sufferings. He was kind, and affected great concern.

"Dear, dear me! And you take it with the bravery of a regiment of soldiers, I'm sure. Never was such a courageous creature. 'Tis quite the talk of Ilsington how you bear up against your tortures."

"Well they may say so; but none, unless 'tis this girl here, my niece, will ever know what I've been through by night and day. I often wonder, in my pain, what there's in store to make up for it. It can't be but that such agony as mine will be paid for with interest added."

"Them the Lord loves He chastens; and no doubt, taking it all round, Miss Widger, He loves the women better than the men; for certain it is, that He puts the most and the worst of this world's pain upon 'em. And, in a sort of way, the back's suited to the burden. Women suffer better than men. Why, good Lord! there's many a female have endured more from her corns alone than some men have got to bear in their whole lives! Yet, when all's said, there's none so brave as you."

They spoke a little longer on the subject of Miss Widger's failing powers and approaching end.

"I've kept my part of the bargain," she declared, "and I look to the Lord to keep His. And there's little more to be said about it."

He nodded, glad to change the conversation; and it was then that poor Jenny's eyes were opened, and she perceived how not her sufferings, but her niece's engagement had really brought Mr Snow to the cottage.

"So Miss Widger is your aunt?" he asked Drusilla, as she laid the tea things. "Why! then, by the same token, you'll be Miss Whyddon, the daughter of that hero that saved Sir Percy's son's life in the war?"

"So I am," she said, and her head was full of interest, because Timothy had not told her on the night of his visit to his uncle what had transpired at that visit. For the moment, however, Mr Snow said no more, and fell into silence. He ate and drank, and talked on general topics, and not until tea was nearly ended did he plunge suddenly into the business upon which he was come.

"What's this I hear of a tokening between you and

my nephew, young woman? Is it true, or be Timothy dreaming? He comed to me with his mouth full of news o' Sunday, and so excited was he that I couldn't be sure of what he meant, or how far it had reached. He was a trifle shy of telling me about it, because, to be plain, he knew my views very well. And I was a good bit concerned, and—and—— But I needn't vex your ears with the silly story. Perhaps you can tell me I misunderstood him?"

Miss Widger spoke. She was angry.

"Ah! 'tis that have fetched you! And didn't I ought to have seen it? Failing fool that I am, I thought you'd called about my face, but of course you hadn't. I wonder that you can take advantage of a sick creature—'tis cowardly I call it—and the tea, too—getting tea under false pretences like that!"

Lot blew out his breath and drew it in again heavily.

"Good powers! what a terrible indecent thing it is to tell out your thoughts like what you do, woman!" he said. "But 'tis a family failing, and your late brother, Nathaniel Widger, done just the same. But it don't pay, my dear; and when your thoughts be mistaken, as in this case, then you be left in the wrong box, and stand the chance of making enemies. I came for two reasons, and 'twas just as much to tell you I was sorry for your trouble, as it was to tell you I was sorry for my own. You ban't very reasonable, Jenny Widger, and you ban't very nice—to say it kindly. But the third cup, as I want, I'll have if you please—just to show I bear no ill-feeling."

"I see through you," she said. "'Tis my fatal gift that I can see through all men."

"Well, I don't envy you the sight. We're good and bad, but oftener bad than good. And now, since I ban't welcome, I'll get going. And I hope from my heart you won't be called upon to suffer much longer, but soon fly away to your martyr's crown. That's a well-meant wish, at least, and 'twill take you all your time to read any wrong meaning into it. And as for this maiden, if she's done her tea, perhaps she'll come and walk by my hoss a bit and have a tell."

He rose and shook hands with Drusilla's aunt. The

sufferer was puzzled to know what answer would befit Lot's hope concerning her future, and before she could think on a right reply he was gone. He mounted laboriously, using a wayside stone as upping-stock, and the girl, with a beating heart, walked beside him as he desired.

At first her fears were allayed, and the old man woke a hope that all was to be well; but presently he revealed the truth of his inexorable purposes, and set them before her in such a manner that her own freedom of action and of speech were taken from her.

The gloaming brooded and waned over the hills as they passed slowly along, between Yarner, stretched in shadow below them and the moorland, flaming with the last of the light above.

"And so you like my fine boy, Drusilla?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr Snow."

"What for, I wonder?"

"Just for himself and his own character."

"D'you know it?"

"A little. He's too clever for a girl like me to understand all of him. But he's wonderful, and he's thought all his life, and read hundreds of books—oh, he's very, very different from all other men that ever I met or heard about."

"You think a mighty lot of him, then?"

"I love him with all my heart and soul. I didn't know a woman could feel so for a man. 'Tis almost a terrible thing to feel what I feel, and it frights me sometimes. He's my life—waking and sleeping. You might say he was the breath I draw."

"O Lord! That's poetry, I suppose, but a very clever way of putting it, no doubt. 'The breath you draw!' Well, well!"

"There's nothing I would not do for love of him, Mr Snow. I can't tell what I feel; 'tis far beyond any words of mine. He's changed my life and made it a blessing and a godsend, which it wasn't before."

"With nobody in it but Miss Widger, 'twas on the tame side for sartain. She's a sad job for a young creature. But she'll soon journey to a better place, and, my word!

what a lot she'll expect of Heaven! But you won't have her to fret you much longer, anyhow."

"She doesn't fret me any more. I'm only full of sorrow for her—for all she's missed."

"Ah! So you see life now. She's missed a man; and I've missed a woman. But are you sorry for me, too?"

She smiled up at him, and he scorned her face and failed to appreciate its intellectual significance. "To put a gal like this afore Audrey!" he thought.

"I suppose those that are in love feel sorry for any one that isn't," answered Drusilla to his question.

He made no reply, and she grew nervous, and her step faltered.

"I ought to be going back to my aunt now, Mr Snow."

"Wait a moment. Touching Timothy. He's a lot to you—your life and breath, and all the rest of it. Well, tell me what love means, because I don't know. 'Twas one of the good things that didn't come my way—too ugly and busy, I reckon. But just you tell me how love makes you feel to anybody. Do you put him afore yourself or after? Is it a selfish or an unselfish thing? Would you drown to save him? Do you mean and wish nothing but good to him, or do you look to him first to make your own good? Be love of man the love that puts down its life for its friend, or a different and cheaper brand, that sets self and the joy to be won to self out of the love higher than the joy of putting the loved thing and its good afore your own? I doubt I don't make my meaning very clear, being ignorant of what you feel; but there 'tis in a nutshell: does he come first and his good, or do you come first and your good? Be his good yours, and, if not, which would you put afore t'other?"

"He's taught me to believe our good is one," she said. "My good's his, and for sure his good be mine."

"That's just what I wanted to reach to. And the question is, do you know his good? And the answer is, you don't. You don't, Drusilla Whyddon, because he don't himself; or if he do, he's took good care to hide it from you."

"Why should he hide it?"

"I'll tell you, since you ought to know. Granted he's alive to it—for such a clever man wouldn't make any mistake or be blinded by love or any other passion that smites people. Granted he knows, then you ask, why is it he haven't told you? And I knew you'd ask that question, and I'm here to answer it."

He paused, and drew up his horse to give effect to his next speech.

"In a word," he said, "the future prosperity of my nephew is in your hands, and he well knows it; but he won't let you know it for fear—for fear such a strong-minded and fine thing as you appear to be, would do her duty by him. You're right to think well of the boy. He's good, steadfast, and clever, and he believes that he's honest. But as we stand there's a sad fear that he'll prove otherwise, and do what can't be called either honest or just."

He broke off, feeling that she had lost the thread of his argument.

"We'll leave that and come to the point. You know that neither man nor woman can live to themselves alone—don't you? Well, Timothy mustn't, no more than any other. But he's trying to do so. He's trying to forget his obligations and responsibilities and the state of life to which it has pleased God to call him. He's not free—nobody's free. The case is peculiar, and there are family obligations which, if he's honourable and straight, he must face and accept. He's known them ever since he came here, and it's madness trying to shut his eyes to them as he is doing just now. In a word, his duty is to obey me in the matter of his future, and marry in a certain quarter—his solemn, bounden duty. You didn't know that, and I'm mighty sorry that it falls to me to tell you; but you've made it easier by your very high tone, and the fine feeling you have for Timothy, and the understanding you have of what the best and properest sort of love stands for. You mean nothing but good to Timothy—I see that clearly enough. His welfare is more to you than your own. That's why I tell you these things, and ask you to help me now to show my boy

his duty. And if you can't do that, you can do better and help him to *do* his duty, which is still more to the point. It stands like this: if he don't wed where I wish him to wed, he's ruined—ruined for evermore. He knows it, and it's only fair you should also."

Drusilla it was who now stood still, and the old man reined up his horse beside her.

"It's hard," he admitted, "but life's full of these rough knocks, and what looks pretty bad at first sight be often a blessing in disguise. If I didn't think a very great deal of your character, I shouldn't waste time talking or telling you how the matter lies, because I should know 'twas useless; but, seeing what you are, I feel a pretty tidy hope that you'll be able to put his lifelong good afore this match-making, and, for love of him, refuse him. And you may look to me not to forget it, if all goes well. You've spoken so terrible strong about your love for him, and shown me that 'tis built in such a grand pattern, that I feel most hopeful you'll be o' my side. In a word, I want you to help me. I'll bate nothing, and not make the task seem lighter than it is by a hair's-breadth. 'Tis a very great task for a pair of young shoulders, yet so high do I set you that I think you be strong enough to carry it through. Will you give him up—for his everlasting good, so as he may be a just and honest man, and do rightly, and not live to go soured and conscious-bitten all his days?"

She was hysterical, and he checked his impatience and spoke kindly and sought to calm her.

At last she promised with the voice of one who walked in her sleep.

"So far so good," he said. "And such a grand girl I think you, for making the promise, that if 'twasn't for Audrey Leaman and all she stands for, I'd be quite content for Timothy to have taken you; but, you see, it can't be, and come presently you'll allow I was right. The man is too high-minded to marry you without mourning his duty and clouding his days for ever afterwards. Well begun is half done, they say; and you've begun well and bravely—very well and very bravely.

But 'tisin't enough you tell him you can't take him: you must give him no reason. Because, you see, if Tim finds that 'twas I put the spoke in his wheel, human nature will out, and we shan't be no nearer where we want to get. Indeed, 'twould ruin all. What you've got to say to yourself be just this: I want for Timothy Snow to be a happy and prosperous man, standing well afore God and his neighbour; and 'tis in my power to help him to be so. And I'll do anything and suffer anything for that purpose. So with that high resolve you just throw him over, and when he cries out for the reason—why, you don't give no reasons, but say you be in a changed mind and ain't got no more use for him. It do sound harsh—it is harsh—but 'tis better to be harsh and plain as daylight than gentle and not clear. You've got to bear the burden of this. I wish I could; but if you throw it on me, all our trouble's in vain, and he'll turn against his own flesh and blood, and very like to do some rash act in his misery that a lifetime won't serve to mend. There'll be a cruel temptation to tell him the truth and shrink from the lash he'll let fall on your heart, Drusilla; but bear this in mind while you suffer—that you're doing it for his highest and best good. There 'tis; and be you one of they old-fashioned, grand sort of females as could do such a big thing, or ban't you? But I know the answer to that better than what you do. I'm pretty clever at reading a man or woman's powers in their faces and hands, and I tell you that you can do it—given the Lord on your side."

He ceased and listened to her panting, half choked by the emotion he had aroused. She was hardly mistress of herself, but the light in her eyes satisfied him. Her mouth worked, and its muscular action told him all that words could have told him.

"Well done you! 'Tis a very fine thing, and makes me feel a very great respect for you, and a very great respect for what be called 'love.' I hardly thought 'twas a contrivance stout enough to rise to this. Remember—no reasons, no arguing, no going back. If you'm strong enough to do it at all, I'm sure you'm strong enough to

see it through. You'm made of rare stuff—like your father was. A very heroic man, but he never done nothing half so big as you be going to do. I think a terrible lot of you, and I shan't forget it—I shan't forget it, Drusilla Whyddon. You be worthy of any man, and too good for most as ever I met with. But be that as 'twill, I'll find you a proper husband some day!"

And he kept his word, by act of fate, as yet hidden in time.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

At three o'clock on a July morning Drusilla arose in torment and went out. The lark was overhead, and beneath the high lands, Yarner, like a grey blanket woven without pattern, covered the valley in one featureless and mighty sweep. Above it slate-coloured ridges of cloud hung in masses parallel with the horizon, and higher yet glittered Venus, like a bead of gold upon the pale amber of the sky.

Silent, lucent, breaking out of night at the dim wood edge, spread the monochrome of the fern, and above it spired foxgloves, their forms apparent, their colour still invisible; but a little radiant crown of woodbine above a blackthorn anticipated the honeysuckle hues of the sky with its own, and flashed an aigrette of pure light from the thicket.

Colour crept over the dewy hills and dusky woods. Within Yarner mysterious patches of gloom still lurked under the arms of the forest; but the heads of the trees were brushed with a tremor of light, for a morning wind played upon the hillside, and set all things in glimmering motion. The awful purity of the hour persisted for some time; then the false dawn thrilled with its first flush, and cloudlets of grey, that sprang and grew out of the wind's eye, took a sudden roseate warmth on their slate-coloured breasts. The radiance spread and flowed over the sky to the zenith. It permeated the transparent blue, as a tincture irradiates pure water; and through the rosy light Venus still shone.

The cloud feathers increased and broke and whirled aloft from their fiery birth below the horizon. They

glowed through a range of all sunrise colours, and passed from pink and pale russet to the flash of flame. Their forms changed as the wind kneaded them, they waved in banners, fluttered in ribbons, limned and dislimned upon the increasing brilliance of the sky; and their wealth of dazzling light, gleaned from the invisible sun, reflected their splendour upon earth, until a glow ran over the crowns of the wakened woods and the interspaces of the heath and fern. The light increased; the mystery waned; the virgin chill of morning began to yield to the ardour of the day. At four o'clock earth had donned her proper colours and wore the kirtle of high summer. The early, delicate wonder of the foreglow, familiar to few conscious eyes, had passed, and the great pageant of sunrise was at hand. The world waited through moments of breathless expectation, and Yarner billowed cold and green, for the first rosy magic of the sky was over; the colours and the clouds had gone; it was as though the whole white stage of heaven had been emptied for the coming pomp.

Then, suddenly, a fine thread of gold ran along the edge of the east, and a sunken ridge of vapour that huddled on the horizon was outlined with fire. The herald flash leapt aloft, but light failed and fainted in the immensity of the firmament that it was called to fill, and the blue of the sky actually deepened before the onrush and upward stream of day. On earth it was otherwise; there sunshine burst upon the waking world like a lover, embraced her, kissed her, ran over her, flooded her in streams of splendour from her hills to her valleys, from her water-springs to her seas.

The prodigal light met air chilled by the nocturnal passage of the north wind, and where all had been crystal clear and without one stain; where all had stared sharp and definite as the foreground of a primitive picture, now a wonderful, transparent glow misted over Yarner, and spread upon the solid green bosom of the forest diaphanous vapours of red gold. This spirit of fire rolled deeper and denser as the sun rose; it transformed the woods and flowed over their adult verdure until all

was mellowed and mingled with morning glory. Therein lay the supreme achievement of light, the highest stroke of the sunrise. All other wonders waned before this magic, when the red-mouthed morning pressed her lips upon earth and set air burning like a blush along the hills. The ineffable vision persisted for awhile; then, before the dayspring, it stole away into the depths of the river valleys and little glens as the sun ascended.

It was the dawn of the year as well as the dawn of the day. The pearly husks of cast sheaths and scales had rained under the trees; the shells of hatched eggs and the rent aurelias of flown insects might have been found by the searcher. Under the regiments of the beeches, and through the dead leaves beneath them, last year's mast had freely germinated, and the woodland ways were green with cotyledon leaves of ten thousand potential trees, soon to perish under foot and wheel.

Drusilla Whyddon beheld all, and the sun-winged arrows of the morning smote bitterly into her heart, for she was about to take leave of everything that made life beautiful and precious. She had delayed until delay began to feed upon her and sicken her, then she braced herself to the necessary deed. To-day was to see it; she knew the hour of Timothy's passing, and remembered that at five o'clock he would be going homeward from the coops of the young pheasants. She went to lie in wait for him, therefore, and met him presently at a clearing, where some thousands of silver birches had been felled during the previous autumn. The poles were gone; the stumps were sawn up for firewood, and still remained in great mounds that shone as though they were made of silver and pale brass. Already from each root sprang again strong, green suckers to build new trees, where the coppice had been shorn away.

"Good powers! You at last. 'Tis a longful time since I have seen you," cried the man. He set down his gun by a wood-pile, and took her into his arms; while she,

knowing it would be the last time he caressed her, suffered it and fed on the sacrament as one dying.

"'Tis your poor aunt I know keeps you, so I ban't fretting over-much," he said, with his arms still round her and his face against hers. "But I wish she'd pass and go to peace, and let peace come back to you. You're always so full of her that I don't count. 'Tis a case for the dead to bury their dead, as they say. And how have you escaped to-day?"

She did not speak, but shut her eyes and felt his face against hers. A ray of hope touched him.

"Don't say she's dead! What luck that would be—all round. Then we could fix up our affairs and make our plans."

"She's not dead. She may live a month—or two months, for that matter. Tim, listen. There's something else dead—something else have got to be dead. I won't beat round the bush; I won't waste time coming to it. I won't torture myself any more, or I shall go mad. Tim, this can't go on—it mustn't—I don't want it to. You understand it all comes out of me. I've changed—utterly changed. I shall always care for you and think well of you, and—and value all you've taught me and remember how you've lifted me up. But—you haven't lifted me high enough—not high enough to marry you. There's a thousand reasons against it. They've crowded down on me and pretty well smothered me. I've had a bad time, Timothy, and I want to finish it and get back to peace if I can. So you must be merciful——"

She hesitated, and he spoke. For some moments he had been staring at her in absolute amazement and self-forgetfulness. He had stood frozen, as it seemed, with his jaw fallen and his arms held up, exactly in the position they had occupied round her neck when she slipped out of them; for she moved a little way from him before she told him these things.

"What the mischief are you trying to say, Drusilla? Have you seen a ghost in the wood? Have the pixies been at you?"

He laughed at his own jest, felt reassured by his own voice and approached her. But she prevented him.

"Don't touch me again, Tim. 'Tis all out now—'tis wrong for you to do it. It's over—all over and done. Old history, in my mind—so old that it seemed queer and wrong for you to kiss me just now. And it was wrong. I ought not to have suffered it; but something gave way in me; I couldn't help it. I wanted your arms round me just once more; I wanted to feel your lips on mine just once more. And now I have, and I'm going to be strong and——"

Again he interrupted, and now he was angry.

"If this is a game, have done!" he shouted. "Poorer fooling never was, and I won't have it. What are you talking and pretending and snivelling about? Be clear, as you very well know how to be. You've angered me, Drusilla, because well you know this is not the way to talk to me. What's the matter? If I'm at fault, tell me the fault, and let me say I'm sorry and be forgiven."

His anger faded before her evident suffering; he ended gently and approached her again. But she kept him off.

"Don't," she said, "don't be kind; be angry; be savage; be mad. You've a right to be. I can't tell you anything—not a word. I can't excuse it, nor yet explain it, nor anything. But I can't marry you, Tim. I can't do it for countless reasons, and I'm not going to marry you, and you must hear me say so."

He stared and looked at her where she stood very pale by the silver faggots of the birch. He remembered long afterwards that at this moment had come to his nostrils the scent of the fir trees beside the clearing. They exuded a morning incense under the sunrise fires; and for all his days henceforth that fragrance stabbed his heart.

"Not marry me, Drusilla! Why not? What's happened to turn you and change you? Am I awake?"

"Don't think that any idle fancy has come over me, Timothy. Look at me—look at me. That'll tell you 'tisn't a thing of a moment—nor the act of a know-nought fool or a mad creature. It's got to be, for many and many a cause, and I know it, and have fought it out."

"'Many and many a cause,' you say. You're throwing

me over for many and many a cause! Name one of them—I only ask for one.”

“Don’t, then,” she answered, “because ’tis vain. I can’t be answerable for my feelings. They’re not in my keeping. Hard you may think it and wicked if you like, but I’m neither hard nor wicked, and yet I won’t go on with this; and I won’t give no reason, neither. I’ve seen light in my darkness and the truth of some things, and that’s all I can tell you, Tim. Don’t ask nothing. Be that kind. ’Tis better for—for me. ’Tis better for me that I don’t marry you, and far—far better for you, you don’t marry me. And if you can’t see it as clear as I can, Timothy, the time’s coming when you will. I loved you well—God knows it—and you loved me dearly, and well I know it—and well I may, for I’ve got to live in the memory of it for evermore. ’Twill be all the light left in my life. But that’s all—that’s all, Timothy; and I ask you now to show you love me once more—just once, and don’t torment a broken-hearted woman with questions she can’t answer.”

“‘Can’t answer’! Why not? D’you mean you’re going to give me up without a reason, Drusilla?”

“No, no—not without a reason. I tell you there are many reasons, but I am not called to give a reason. What if I did? Haven’t I heard you laugh at a woman’s reasons.”

“I’m not like to laugh at yours. Just pitch upon this wood here, and think what you’re saying and remember who you’re talking to. This is life and death, remember. You come to me almost in sight of our wedding day and—and say ’tis all off between us, and that you won’t marry me. That’s bad enough if ’twas true, but when I get over the blow and prepare to make a fight for my own—for my own, Drusilla—you lift this wall afore me. ’Tis to be blank silence and no reason given. O Drusilla, what have I done, and what are you dreaming about? Such things can’t be in simple honesty between them that love each other.”

His face grew haggard under the morning light. He came closer. A wood-pigeon clashed away above them, and Snow’s dog barked, capered fiercely, and put its fore-

feet up on the stem of a fir. Aloft a squirrel sat beyond reach of harm.

"Such things have got to be this time," she answered, "and don't think, because I deny reasons, there are none. I'll neither give them nor deny them; so don't invent reasons, Tim, else you'll do me more harm than I deserve. Let me go—a million words won't better it. Let me go, and try your best to forget me, and do your best to find another woman who will help you to. You ask what you have done. You have done nothing—nothing but love a woman who can't wed you—that's all."

She rose and was going away; she moved a few paces with footsteps unsteady and a body swaying helplessly; but he would not let her go. He stopped her, and took her by the shoulders and led her back and made her sit down again.

"Not like that," he said. "You forget yourself and you forget your company. Remember that I've been your first thought for many a long day now, and you've been my life and hope. You've got to play the game with me—such as it is. You don't slip away like a cobweb on the wind now. Such things can't be. A man such as I am of all men—a very reasonable man—a man that trusts to reason and looks to reason to pull him out of every fix—is such a man to be treated like this, without rhyme or reason? And by you—you, famed for being so gentle and so patient and so kind to all? So kind to everybody, and so quick to help and cheer and do good works! Is that to happen? Can you jilt me? Can you look in my face and say you don't love me no more, after all that's passed between us? Can such things be, Drusilla? And if you love me, what becomes of your many reasons for not marrying me, against that master reason why you should? It might be in some cases that the best sort of love would keep a man and woman apart, but by good chance 'twasn't so with us. There never was any proper, worthy reason why you and me shouldn't wed; and not you, nor wicked nor good, nor angels, nor devils could point to one. We're free; we're strong; we're all we should be in body and mind. We came together naturally

and properly under the sky, and we've courted and loved and worshipped under the sky, and there's no just cause anywhere why for we shouldn't wed. And if you say you won't, then you wreck my faith in all creation and ruin my life; and your reason for doing such a thing as that, you may well refuse me, for it must be a damned wicked one."

"Think so if you will. Maybe it is wicked," she answered. "I've got to a pass beyond all feeling now, and I don't know what's right and what's wrong. I only know I shan't give any reason for it, Timothy. Be as harsh as you please. Nought you can say to me will hurt me like what I've had to say to you. Don't keep me no more. I've spoken and I can't change."

"You throw me, then, and deny the reason why?"

"If you could think that I could do that, then put it so."

"How else is there to put it? There are the facts from your own mouth. There's no other way to put it. If you owed the right of being frank and true to anybody on God's earth at any time, 'twas to me—the man that loved you with all his heart and strength. And if you come to him and——"

He broke off, and appeared as she had never seen him before—a suppliant.

"What am I telling to you? 'Tis folly and nonsense—say it is, Drusilla—say you're dreaming, or I am. You can't, you can't give me up now, my precious woman! You love me; you want me. I'm the best thing in your life—the sun in it. You've said so a score of times. And me—me—think of me, and what you've been and what you meant to be to me. Think of all we've said and thought and hoped for ourselves—of our plans and of the joy of building them, of the little things as well as the big ones. Is it all to go—all to be passed over and forgot? Drusilla, you can't think it; you haven't weighed all this means to me and to you. We're only a man and a woman with nothing that counts in the whole world but one another. 'Twill kill you to do it, if I know you; and 'twill ruin me for ever and spoil my usefulness and——"

His voice trailed thinly slower and slower—then it

stopped. The man was shaking before her. She had never known him thus to lose his nerve and exhibit emotion. She had yet to learn that under exceptional stress of circumstances this inexperienced soul was as weak as another and as easily thrown from self-possession. In the time of her departure from him this revelation came, and she perceived the possibility of a softness, a power of feeling and capability of sentiment that she had not seen and not guessed at. It shook her to her soul, but she resisted it; and the phenomenon never recurred in her sight, for Timothy's Snow's life, albeit not lacking in poignant experiences, did not lead him over such an abyss in her company again. But now he stripped himself of reticence and pride before her; for a moment he tore off the familiar vesture of his spirit; he even grovelled, as it seemed. He knelt down at her feet and held her against her will. He implored her to speak, and let him help her to renewed reason and justice.

"Your love's not dead, and I'll never believe it if you swore it!" he cried. "'Tis just choked and smothered by some fog that has got in your brain. Oh, for God's sake, don't hold out no longer and wreck two lives for some mad whim or some false belief! You can't—you can't withhold your reasons, Drusilla. 'Tis judging me without a trial. 'Tis outside your character to do such a thing—'tis impossible and unnatural and damnable. 'Tis as if a devil had got in you. Tear it out while there's time. Don't let some passing madness or passing lie part us for evermore, so long as any power remains to us to escape it."

She was amazed, even in her grief, that he should fight so long and sink his pride so low. But she kept firm—by looking to death to free her presently from the shattered life that would remain after this abnegation. She made haste to escape from him. She was in great agony, and only the thought of death offered any anodyne at that moment. She did not answer, but strove again to leave him and get out of his sight.

Now he restrained her no more, but let her go, and his last speech indicated a return to self-control, and a re-assertion of his nature.

"This is not all. I won't let the best thing that ever came into my life slip out again without a fight for it. 'Tisn't a time for whining, and I'm sorry I did. Forget that. 'Tis a time for work, and I'm going to work to find the reasons you won't give, Drusilla. And when I have, I'll come back to you and make you swallow 'em!"

He shouted the last words, for she had already passed away into the woods. She heard all that he said, but did not turn back; and presently, when she had gone, Snow picked up his gun and went his way. He became angry before he reached home—angry with himself for his abject attitude—angry with the woman for bringing such self-contempt upon him. He was determined before all things to solve this riddle and win Drusilla back to him. He believed it possible, and only one reason of possible reasons would have rendered it impossible. But she had not ceased to love him, and, while her love lasted, he doubted not that his strength would suffice to beat down every objection to their union. The thought comforted and calmed him. He was wrestling with his difficulties before he entered his home; but Sarah Snow, the man's mother, heard nothing of them. They ate their breakfast together silently as usual; while over the forest the full splendour of day unrolled without one shadow to dim it.

CHAPTER II

JOHN REDSTONE met Audrey Leaman on the high-road under Rippon Tor, above Ilsington village. He rode on a horse behind a great flock of sheep newly shorn, and in the sunshine they shone silver-bright through the dust of their passing. They bleated with varying notes, and louder than their noise broke the explosive bark of a big black and white sheep-dog who circled about behind them. The patter of their feet was like the sound of many waters. They panted and thirsted, and there were marks of weariness upon their patient faces.

Audrey stopped the man, smiled graciously, and lifted her hand to be shaken.

"Haven't seen you for a hundred years!" she said. "How are you faring? Have you heard the news?"

"Needn't ax how you are, and nobody in sight yet up to your mark, I suppose? As for me, I be pretty spry, seeing all my troubles. I've sold my sheep—yes, I have; but don't you tell anybody. 'Twas neck or nothing; but 'twill be all right, I suppose, now, and I've got to make an offer to Lot Snow—blast him. He can't go on after what I've done. 'Tis outside honesty to do less than meet me half way, now that I've made such a sacrifice. Tons of money for him now."

But Audrey was not interested in Redstone's affairs.

"I hope 'twill fall out as you wish. Old Snow's gone on me still, and treats me very nicely, but I know he's a bit of a terror to most people. I believe he's awfully pleased for the minute, so you may have luck."

"What about?" asked Redstone.

"About Drusilla Whyddon—her you wanted."

"How's that, then?" he asked, and showed his interest by leaping from his horse. The dog, seeing his movement, went before the sheep and stopped their progress. Some instantly reclined panting upon the road; others left it and sought herbage beside the way.

"Drusilla was tokened to the chap that took your place, Mr Snow's nephew—that good-looking man with the starch in his neck. But he's had a facer: she's thrown him over! A nine days' wonder, you might say. Lord knows, I don't blame her. I expect she began to find him a bit too high and mighty."

"Drusilla's chucked him! You don't say that?"

"Yes, I do. Everybody knows it now, I believe. He's raging. I met him a few days ago. We're civil to one another now, but he was walking past as if I wasn't there. However, I made the man speak, and he told me he should leave Yarnier before long. I asked why for, and went out of my way to be nice. You know I can be, Johnny."

"Devil doubt it."

"And at last he thawed a bit and swore me to secrecy, and told me that, for reasons hidden from him, Drusilla had changed her mind. I was really sorry then, because he's such a proud sort of creature that this work will be just poison to him."

"But why—why? What on earth made her change her mind? And him such a fine sort of chap."

"That's what he couldn't tell me, and I wouldn't tell him. But I know what girls are, and I know his sort. However, I'm not going to run the man down, because he suits me very well in some ways. And if he liked me instead of Drusilla, I should have soon got to like him. But I was no good to him, and 'tis lucky for him I wasn't. He wouldn't have been enough for me."

"How you talk! But I believe you know yourself best. You'd tire of any one man—eh?"

"I'd tire of any one as ever I've seen yet, Timothy Snow included; but maybe I'll find one I shan't tire of if I wait long enough. All the same, I'm not hopeful."

Redstone was silent for a moment, then almost unconsciously he voiced his own thought.

"Free again!"

Audrey understood him.

"Yes, she's free again; and maybe after her dose of the high and mighty Timothy, she'll come to see the sort you are, John. I do think that you'd wear better than Snow, though you ban't so clever and fine to look at."

The man laughed.

"No, no—I don't flatter myself. I did all I could, and worked at her terrible hard to make her like me; but it wasn't in her."

"Like you she did, I'll swear. All the girls liked you."

"You say you know what choked her off him?"

"I don't know, but I guess. Her heart failed a bit. He's a preacher, and she couldn't have took him like I could—in a large, free spirit, and without being feared to think of future adventures. Her idea of a wife is—well, you men's idea of a wife. And my idea of a wife be something quite different."

"I'm sorry for your idea of a husband, then," said Redstone.

It was Audrey's favourite subject, and she continued:

"Don't you say that. I should be a fine wife if I loved a man, but he'd have to take me in a proper, sporting spirit. On the whole, 'tis as well that Timothy hadn't got no use for me; I'd have shook him up too often."

"He's full of very fine opinions, however," declared Redstone.

"No doubt—very large-minded—where he's not pinched; but there's one law for men and another law for women. and, be it as 'twill, Tim Snow ban't large-minded where the women are concerned. I found that out. He's just the very man his wife will hoodwink. I told him so once, and he said that I judged others by myself and didn't know what a good woman was. He thought he knew one at any rate, poor chap. But this business have turned him pretty sour, I reckon."

"Perhaps he'll come your way now?"

She considered.

"I'd take him for a husband if he liked. But he wont like—knows too much about me."

"Perhaps Drusilla will come round."

"That's possible. She'll be all alone in the world in a minute. That old horror, her aunt, is on her last legs."

"'Tis a great mystery. I'd give a lot to know what Drusilla means."

"Ax her. She'd tell you."

He shook his head.

"'Tisn't for me to go in sight of her at a kicklish time like this; 'twouldn't be sporting. Though, Lord knows, I'd dearly love to do it."

Audrey admitted this.

"A very proper thought in you, Johnny. I believe if you'd made love to me, I should have liked you as well as any of 'em."

"But not better. Safety in numbers. You'll die an old maid yet if you don't watch it. You don't know what 'tis to love."

She looked at him with her beautiful eyes and laughed.

"Can you teach me?"

"No, I can't; I'm too slow-witted. I shall be a bachelor man, for sartain."

"That won't hinder you from loving the girls."

"'Tis only waste of time for me."

"Well, you told me a long time ago, before she refused you, that Drusilla thought a lot of you. Perhaps she thinks more now than ever she did. Don't you be too nice and stand-offish. Maybe she's just hungering and thirsting for you again—after such a dose of t'other. And now you know how 'tis, you'll be rather a fool to hold off too long. That's a straight tip for you."

"I wonder," he said, looking with hungry eyes at the sky. "I've told myself 'tis all over with me, and I've grumbled because it looked as if I wasn't getting my fair share. Unlucky in life and unlucky in love both—it ban't fair, Audrey—is it, now?"

"We'll hope you've reached the turning-point, and that all is going to run smooth with you."

"You're a comforter, anyway!"

"What a woman ought to be."

Her face fired him; her mouth invited him. He looked

round about. The sheep were resting and grazing; the black and white dog had gone to sleep with its nose between its forepaws.

"Gi' me a kiss, for the love of the Lord!"-he cried.

She hesitated a moment, and then, with the manner of one who had kissed often, obliged him.

"There!" she cried. "And what do I get for it?"

"Thanks — thanks and a friend," he answered. "If 'tis ever in my power to do you a good turn, I will. Maybe you'll need it. You ban't going to live a tame life, I reckon. There'll be storms and squalls come along whether you wed or bide single. And my advice is, 'Don't you wed.' You'd make a proper fine lover, but a bothersome wife. Now I must get going."

"I believe I could marry you if I wanted to," she said.

But he laughed and mounted his horse.

"Not you—nor any other woman—but her."

"You'll get over that. 'Tis your troubles and bad luck have kept you from thinking of a wife."

"There's only one for me," he answered.

"And she's free again. I wish you luck."

"Same to you."

He whistled his dog, gathered his flock and went his way, and she proceeded on her journey to Widecombe. She had always felt happy with John Redstone by reason of an easy, Dionysian spirit that played over him like an aura. It awoke her kindred spirit. She smiled now as she thought of his freckles, fiery moustache and fiery caress.

She was sorry for him, for she guessed that it was not on his account that Drusilla had thrown over Timothy Snow, and she also suspected that Lot Snow would not meet Redstone's wish whatever it might be. Indeed, Audrey was in Lot's confidence to some extent, and knew that he desired Redstone's farm for his nephew. She watched the progress of events with interest, and was a good deal concerned to see what would be Timothy's next move. He had told her that he intended to leave Yarner; but he did not speak with conviction, and she expected that, in this crisis of his affairs, his Uncle Lot would appeal

with renewed force to him and influence him in the direction it was desired that Timothy should go.

Redstone went his way, drove the sheep to their new owner, and then, with his dog at his heels, rode into Ilsington. He proposed to make Mr Snow an offer of considerable money, and felt sanguine that this course would save the situation and soften the other's heart. The plan had been arranged between John and his grandfather, and the elder gave it as his opinion that such a money-lover as Lot would not resist the offer. "Even if he've got no bowels of kindness to him," said old Jacob Redstone, "the man's himself and a noted worshipper of cash, so it may take him off his feet, like."

They were sanguine, and it was in a cheerful mood that the farmer now dismounted and rapped at the door beside the lich-gate. Sibella Snow, Lot's sister, answered him, and being out of earshot of the house, spoke with him. She knew the circumstances and pitied John.

"I'm afraid there's no seeing my brother to-day," she said, "for he's took bad and is keeping his bed, and he won't see you of all men; because he's spoke the last word on your business, and he wants your place for his own needs."

"But things have altered, and I've got a very clever proposal with tons of money to it," said John. "I don't come empty-handed—quite the contrary. You might tell him, Miss. I know the sort he is, and I shouldn't be here to waste his time—a man with so many irons in the fire as him."

"So he has, then—more than anybody knows but himself. I'm afraid—but I'll tell him you mean business."

"And won't keep him—say that. All I've got to say can be said in two minutes, and then he'll see how terrible much in earnest I am, and what I've sacrificed and lost—all to keep my own. 'Tis a very hard thing, Miss, that Dury should be took away from me, and no fault of mine, remember."

"I know nothing about that—except that it is hard. But life's hard, John Redstone, and no man begins it free.

We all start to the good or the bad, according to our natures and to the blood in our veins, and then as went afore us. There's always a legacy of some sort—for good or bad or both."

"My father was a proper chap, and I'll never grumble against him whether or no. But I'll grant that he flouted your brother and galled him from his death-bed. Be a live man to be punished for the work of a dead one? 'Tisn't sporting."

"But 'tis the way things fall out, all the same. I'll tell him you're here, anyway. Will you come in and sit down?"

But John refused.

"Not unless he'll see me," he answered.

She left him then, spoke to her brother, and returned presently with a message. Lot was prepared to see the visitor, and John soon stood by the old man's bed. Mr Snow had the clothes drawn to his chin, and his immense white face was crowned by a dirty red night-cap pulled down over his brow and ears.

"D'you know the old, ruined mine in Yarner Woods?" he asked abruptly, without any salutation.

"Know it! Of course I do. Wasn't I keeper there for years and years?"

"Very well, then, this day fortnight I'll be there to meet you. And you keep the matter quiet as death. At five in the afternoon, or a bit later, I'll be there. I've got ideas about the place, and you can tell me all you know of it; but that's neither here nor there, and a secret anyhow, so don't you say where you are to meet me. We shall have it to ourselves, and I'll hear what you've got to tell. That's the only time and place will suit. And I want to know a bit about the old mine from you. My illness have thrown me back in my work terrible, and so soon as I get out again, I'll be more than busy to make up for lost time."

John Redstone was irritated, but felt it idle to be angered with the speaker.

"You're like one of they cussed lawyers—takes a pleasure in putting off and putting off and putting off. You know that to a man like me, with my future at stake,

'tis hell to bide in doubt week after week, especially after what I've done and sacrificed."

"Larn patience, and don't show your teeth at me, or else I'll draw back what I've said," answered the frowning elder.

"I've been patient—nobody can tell how patient but my grandfather. To a man such as me this waiting—— But there's no need to yelp about it, as you say. I hope you'll be decent, and treat me as you'd like to be treated yourself. I'll be at the old mine next Friday week at five o'clock; and if you ban't there I'll wait for you. And I know all about the mine," declared Redstone.

"So much the better. Us'll leave it at that. And don't you breathe a word of it, or tell anybody where you be going to meet me, else the people will smell a rat. None must know as I'm interested in the place."

The younger man departed, and soon he had turned from his own affairs and their uncertainty to other matters. A circumstance that dominated all the rest centred in Drusilla's action. He knew her for a very steadfast woman and marvelled that she should have broken her troth with Timothy. Deeply he considered a course so unexpected, and much he puzzled to come at the reason which had prompted it.

CHAPTER III

THERE was a morbid strain in Drusilla Whyddon's nature, and love had not hidden it from Timothy. She had always indulged in mysterious silences, and sometimes she had broken her appointments, and sometimes, when they were happy together, without apparent reason she had fallen into tears. He considered all these things now that she had broken with him, and strove how best to win her back again. At times the desire for her dominated his pride and self-consciousness; but not seldom the wrong that he felt at this treatment exceeded the grief he felt at it. For some time after her declaration he kept away from her; but since none came to him, and none, as it seemed, had taken his place in her regard, he began to wonder whether the whole scene in the wood at dawn had not become as unreal to her as to him. He sought her to give her opportunities. He declared to her that some evil spirit must surely have been fooling them in the forest; he begged her to deny the things that she had said, and come back to him again. But she would not. She did not hide her grief, yet refused to change her fixed resolution. He left her, and was deeply incensed. For a time he held off, then longing mastered him and he saw her again, and begged, with a humility inspired by his love and his loss. He prayed her to save the situation and speak fearlessly. He guessed that his faults had changed her mind, and entreated her to state all her grievance that he might make amends and err no more. Drearly they traversed the old ground, and their thoughts and arguments moved in a circle.

As for the woman, she was suffering far more than the man, and death promised the only possible escape to her. Each day made the renunciation more terrible, and her life worse to be lived. She watched at Jenny Widger's death-bed and envied her. A sense of taint and pollution and loss drove her into the arms of death, and when she walked in the woods for brief periods, it was the suffering woven into the summer days that chimed with her mood and challenged her attention. She felt herself a maimed, unfinished thing; no comfort came of her self-sacrifice, yet from the depth of her own miseries she could find it in her to be astonished at the troubles of animate and inanimate existence. Happiness had hidden them, but now her eyes were opened by suffering to see suffering, and she found that it was everywhere; that a complete prosperity and affluence in the woods appeared as the exception rather than rule; that success only belonged to the mighty by right of battle, and to the mean by strength of their strangling legions. The giant elm had won its way through a century of strife, had fought to the crown of the wood and established its claim to light and air and water, so long as it should endure; while the herd of the stinging nettles that claimed kinship with it, achieved victory by the foul weapon of poison and the gift of numbers and fecundity. But death appeared to be the only true monarch of the forest and he reigned everywhere. The battle at this season was becoming a race against death for reproduction. She saw the struggle, and felt that Nature must be universally inconsistent. Until now she had shut her eyes as much as possible to the underlying principles of life and death; until now she had sought to dwell rather in the atmosphere of sentimental values; but the work that Timothy had begun in her mind was at length completed by hard chance. She dreaded death no more, but as one of his chosen—one swiftly to pass out of life, she approached him fearlessly, and wondered to note how near he had been all the time. Not a glade or dingle but showed his passing; not a tree or herb but hung some tattered

trophies to him, not a path or clearing but revealed traces of him in fur and feathers and the fragments of dead beasts, dead insects, dead flowers, and dying trees. Death began to look to Drusilla a very blessed matter, after all. It would still the torments of her heart and brain. At worst it was a dreamless sleep; at best, and she believed in a future, it must open the door to a life higher than love, a life where all things would be changed, and the power to do made greater and the power to suffer made less—perhaps destroyed altogether. She longed with increasing longing to perish, and since there would be none to depend on her when her aunt passed, she felt no claim of conscience entered against the deed.

In this mood Timothy Snow came to her for the last time, and asked her to speak with him; and she, feeling that the end was in sight, and knowing herself too strong now to be shaken by any appeal, consented.

They sat where an elder tree had fallen at the edge of the woods. But it still lived, and pointed new growth upwards from its recumbent pillar.

"I know your time is very full, and I've no more right to ask you for any of it; but a man doesn't give up what he wants most in the world without a fight. I beg you, Drusilla, to think what you're doing. It's a terrible thing after what we've been to one another."

"I know that—I know how terrible, better than you do. But nothing can change me now. I've got over it; I don't want to go back."

"Can't you be commonly just? Don't you see what it looks like to other eyes? I'm not asking you to come back to me any more if your mind's past changing; but I'm asking you for what you took away, and I do think, in justice and decency, Drusilla, you ought to give me that. I shan't interfere, mind; I shan't make any row or strife. I'm proud, and I couldn't long love any creature that didn't love me back. But things have happened that seem to me beyond the power of nature to bring about. You've turned from me all on a sudden, and I'm innocent of offence as the unborn child. Can't you do me this scant

right—this bare justice—and tell me once for all why you've thrown me over? If 'tis another, say so: I shan't quarrel with him; if 'tis not another, then 'tis something in me that have shocked you or frightened you, and I ought to know it. 'Tis a very cruel thing to hide it from me."

She desired to plunge into explanations, but knew that it was impossible. If once she began to talk, she must inevitably weaken and offer unarmed statements to his attack. A stubborn silence was her only safeguard. She perceived this now, and regretted that she had come to listen to him. She put the blame on the man. Her instinct was, if possible, to quarrel and conceal the truth of her misery. It was hard to do so; but let Timothy once be mastered by natural anger and she knew that he would leave her and spare her any future meeting.

"You've said all this before. What's the use of it? I can't change, and I can't tell you why I've given you up. I never will—never."

"But don't you see that's not the act of a sane woman? But you are not out of your mind, and I've a right to know your reason, Drusilla."

"How if I don't know it myself?"

He showed impatience.

"Don't play the fool with words—or with me. That's worse than cruelty. You light-minded! No, no—you're pretending—to gain some private ends, I suppose; but it's mean and low and unwomanly and everything else that's hateful, to do what you've done in the way you've done it. Did I deserve to be treated so? Have I been double or dishonest or crooked with you? Has it ever fallen in any man or woman's power to say one bitter word against me?"

"I don't know about that," she said, hurting him deliberately.

He started and looked at her.

"None's ever spoken against you to me, if that's what you mean," she continued.

"No," he said, "I know that, unless they've lied. Perhaps you would have been glad if they had? Perhaps

you would have been glad to get some shadow to ease your conscience with? I'd forgive any change of mind, anything that you weren't strong enough to fight against. There's nothing—nothing I wouldn't forgive, but this brute dumbness."

"I wish I was a dumb brute," she answered; "you'd be merciful to that."

"And ain't I merciful to you? Ain't I patient? Is there another man that ever you heard of would be more patient?"

She struck again. From the depth of her own misery, his griefs seemed trifling. Her nerves were raw and jarring. She knew that the end for her was near at hand, and believed that he would weather the storm and yet live to be a happy and contented man.

"Yes, all the virtues you've got—and know it, seemingly. 'Tis a great consolation to you, of course, that the fault's my side."

"How can you—how can you—you that loved me, or said you did? If the fault for all lies in me—if I've done wrong and been stuck-up and proud and not lover-like—if I've choked you off me by my own conduct, then, for God's sake, try to save me and tell me where I failed, and give me one trial to do better. 'Tisn't human to strike like this without warning and without cause. Only gods and devils treat man so."

"I've done," she answered. "I can't talk about it, and I won't, and you're wasting your time to try and make me. You go your own way and find a better girl; and don't take no blame to yourself, because there's no need. Blame me—I don't care."

"You heartless devil!" he cried out. "Not to care! That's worst of all. Then I'll not care neither, and feel the likes of you was only the likes of all women. You'd hid yourself a bit more cunning from me—that's all. But you're the same as the rest—a cat-hearted, selfish wretch! The lies you've told! And knew right well you was lying with my arms round you and my kisses on your mouth. And you with such straight eyes and a voice so true! No better than that giglet wench, Leaman's

daughter—'no better,' I say? You're not so good, nor so honest, nor so trustworthy, for she don't pretend, whatever her faults may be."

"Go to her, then!"

"Mind your own business henceforth and keep my name off your lips, and I'll do the like with yours. You've taught me some things I didn't know, and I thank you for that. And now I'll set about forgetting you; and I'll do it—for you're not worth remembering. And the thing you've done is a terrible bad thing—remember that. A cruel, cold-blooded, evil thing, without a shadow of excuse for it. Your motives are bad and vile, and you know it, else you wouldn't be so strong to hide them. You'll suffer for this, though you may think not. You'll smart for this to your dying day, Drusilla."

"I know that," she said. "It won't——" She was going to say the torture would be short, but desisted. She got up from the fallen tree. "Don't worry me no more," she concluded. "You've got to live your life, and no doubt the maiden's not far off will share it, and make you thank the Lord I dropped you."

"I do that now," he answered, "for a worse wife than such as you would make would be hard to find. I'm punished properly for being fool enough to trust in any woman, and never again will I do it. You're all of a piece, and there's no truth or honour in you. I'd curse you if curses counted. But there's no need. You'll wreck yourself all right, for you're built to come between yourself and the light every time. This can't be hid—it must out, and the people will know where the blame lies."

"D'you think I care?"

"Yes, you care—I know that much about you. You care a lot, and you'll care more and more, and the end will be worse than the beginning. This ends for me, here and now, but it don't end for you, and you'll live to be sorry you treated a decent man so wickedly. I'll see you no more, and speak with you no more. You can go to your friends—no doubt they're more high-minded and honest and decent than me."

His petulance and wounded vanity did not escape her ; but they too tortured, since it was she who had dragged them to the surface of him. What could be more cruel than to strip off the armour from the weak spot in his soul, or expose to the light the nakedness of his nature, which he strove to keep hidden? It was an immodest, hateful act, and her spirit writhed.

She said no more, but watched him turn his back and go. For a while she moved listlessly hither and thither. She clutched at trivialities to allay the grief of her spirit, and, passing the rhododendron bush that she had long cared for, began to break away the seed cases and relieve the plant of them. It was a work she had performed for several years, because a gardener had told her that it ought to be done.

She ceased, however, before the task was completed, climbed up out of the woods and went home. She felt a sort of gladness that the last scene with Timothy had left him angry. She hoped that his uncle's ends would presently be gained, and that, when he had recovered from this blow, the keeper would become interested in Audrey Leaman. But her thoughts, that were calm in the moment when young Snow left her, became terribly agitated now that he was gone. She hungered for death, and hungered for the time when her lover should know that she was dead.

The doctor and a nurse were with Jenny Widger when Drusilla returned. The end seemed near, but Jenny declared herself as stronger.

"The Lord be going to pile sufferings on sufferings," she said. "'Tis His will, and I don't complain. I'm in sight of the reward a'most, and I've a right to think upon it, and comfort myself with the size of it."

She dwelt upon this grateful theme to the exclusion of all others. Her sure and certain reward was the anodyne which lessened her tortures and fortified her against the losing battle.

"It have been cat and mouse between me and God for fifty year," she said in the small, dreary voice of the dying. "Ess say ! for His own secret reasons. And though

it have seemed a hard fight, and I very near lost it more than once, yet I've conquered Him in the end. I dare say He was very much surprised to find what a will I'd got. They say cards beat their makers, and I reckon men and women do the same sometimes—the women, anyway. The Almighty's a male—ban't He? Ess, He is, and therefore the females must puzzle even Him in and out. But I—I dare say He's been proud sometimes to look at me wriggling in my frightful agonies, and keeping a stiff upper lip the while. And if I know anything, there's eternal justice behind all the Almighty's ways; and so 'twill be in my case. Heart of man couldn't rise to picture a fair return for all I've been through, but the wisdom and justice of God will rise to it."

"What is it you would like, Miss Widger?" asked the nurse, who had found that her patient was easiest when discussing this subject.

"He knows what I'd like very well," she answered. "I've thought it all out, and He can read my thoughts and act according. I want everlasting comfort and a heavenly mansion with eight rooms. He might go and plan a palace, like Yarner House, with a park and ten thousand a year, but all that would be nought to me. Simple I've been in this world, and simple I'll bide through eternity. Just a nice little lew place in the full sun of His countenance, with as much garden as we had to Ilsington in my girlhood; and my old father and mother to live along with me and be looked after. And not a pang of mind or body—not the faintest, leastest morsel of an ache or pain; but to rise every morning without a stab or a sigh—brisk and glad to wake and get up, hungry and thirsty as a bee, and ready to get breakfast and do the work of the day after."

"Just a homely, useful life, Miss Widger?" said the doctor; and she nodded.

"That's what I expect—and work, too; but no call to do the work if I don't want. Free as the angels and happy as the queen, and just one useful young woman under me to do my bidding, and one useful man for the garden and the hoss. A married couple might do very nice. One horse and a open trap I've always felt the need of and shall

want. Or it might be two horses and a covered tilt for winter. But 'tis no use telling about. 'Tis all waiting, and I shan't be much longer afore I enter into the joys the Lord have planned. The prizes be ready. I shall scream out a bit afore the finish, I expect, and then I shall be gone to my great reward."

"There's no need for you to suffer," said the man ; but she contradicted him.

"There's every need, and I won't have you, nor anybody else, coming between me and my reward. Don't you go dosing me if I shriek out ; because every throb I miss at the finish may be a trifle off the rich and rare reward and a few precious things the less. 'Tisn't only the creature comforts I count upon : 'tis the fame of it. The quality must always be over us, because they was born so, and there'll be kings and queens and tinkers and plough boys in heaven just the same as here : but us'll all be weighed in the same pair of scales for all that, and my great sufferings will lift me up to a very high place ; and them as know my story will certainly put me above themselves ; and t'will get out in time all I've been through, and I shall have the people looking round after me in the golden streets. Ess fay, they'll look and whisper to each other and say, 'There she goeth—that little, humble creature ! 'Tis Jenny Widger !' they'll say ; and I shall stand with Job and other suffering heroes, and my place in company won't be far ways short of theirs, I suppose."

They agreed with her, while her blazing eyes softened before the spectacle of the future, and her rejoicing soul supported her body until she welcomed the torture of her disease and felt uneasy in those times when nature for a little while allayed the torment.

CHAPTER IV

A FORTNIGHT passed, and now that her final refusal to consider him had sent Timothy from her sight for ever, Drusilla suffered the full onset of loss, and began terribly to long that she might see the man once more before the end. A day came when she watched her aunt die at dawn, and some hours after the old woman had passed, Drusilla wandered alone through Yarner and welcomed the thought of her own death. She had not been from her home for many days, and knew nothing of what was doing either in the woods or in the world beyond them.

It seemed in the morning light, so clear, so radiant, and so frank, that the forest was standing at ease. The woods basked in August sunshine, and glittering insects flashed among them. Bright and restful was the hour, and bright and restful were the blue horizons that broke dimly through the trees. Drusilla heard a woman singing and knew the voice. She sat where a footpath crossed a heathery hill near the old mine; and to her came Audrey Leaman.

Audrey ceased her song at sight of the other and hesitated in her progress. Drusilla was sitting on a stone with the whole splendour of Yarner beneath her. She did not turn at the sound of the singing, but continued to gaze before her with her chin in her hands and her elbows on her knees.

Audrey passed, hesitated, then turned and came back to Drusilla's side.

"Might I ask how your aunt, Jenny Widger, is going on?" she said.

"Dead," answered the other in a voice that sounded indifferent, but her heart beat fast and her interest poured itself out upon Audrey. It was for this woman that she had yielded up the cup of life's joy. To these lips she had held

it, and starved herself that Audrey might not thirst. She marvelled whether this girl knew of the sacrifice, or was aware that she stood before the victim. But it appeared that Audrey did not know. She spoke quietly as be seemed the news, but it was clear that she regarded Drusilla in no sense as a heroine, neither did she dream of any obligation. She was, however, sorry for the other girl's present tribulation.

"A good thing—poor creature. By all accounts she had a very bad time dying. And no doubt 'twasn't much better for you looking on."

"Very dreadful," said Drusilla. "She was one of the enduring sort, and had suffered such a lot of pain that it got to be second nature to her. Regular greedy of pain at the finish, and didn't want to miss a drop. She kept on crying out she was like Christ at the end. He wouldn't drink no hyssop nor vinegar to deaden the terror of His doom: and no more would she. She refused the physic at last."

Audrey shuddered.

"Don't tell me none of the horrid particulars," she said. "I hate death—oh, how I hate it!"

"There come times, however, when it looks better than life—and a lot easier."

The other girl stared, but Drusilla, who had not moved, still sat with her eyes on the woods beneath them.

"I hope you don't feel like that—a young woman like you," said Audrey. "Death's a long way off you and me yet, and long may it bide so."

"Who can tell? Death's at every turn and under every leaf and behind every tree stem, waiting and watching, though you can't see him. But he sees us, and he'll always come quick enough if you beckon."

"You're queer and sick along of all you've gone through," said Audrey. "I've been wishful to know you this longful time, and I lay I'll cheer you up if you'll let me do so."

Drusilla looked at her doubtfully. It seemed now sufficiently clear that Audrey Leaman knew nothing of the motives that had prompted her to surrender Timothy Snow.

She did not acknowledge Audrey's offer of friendship, but asked a question.

"What are you doing here in Yarner?"

Audrey hesitated, then felt that she must speak.

"I've got a message to give. You'll excuse me, for I know what's fallen out. Mr Lot Snow is a good bit bothered, because he's heard nothing from his nephew for a fortnight. He couldn't come himself, so he sent me. I'm on the way to Timothy Snow's now."

The other nodded and made no answer. She expected Audrey to go upon her way, but Willes Leaman's daughter in a moment of impulse offered friendship. She sat down beside Drusilla and spoke.

"Tell me to be gone if you can't suffer me, but I'm terrible wishful to be friends. Why not?"

"Friends are no good to me now. You're only wasting time."

"Don't say that."

"You mean well, but you don't know what you're doing or saying, I reckon. You can't be no friend to me, but I may do you a service, perhaps."

"Thank you kindly, I'm sure. You're known for a very kind woman; but you've been through a lot lately, and I'm sure 'tis everybody's wish to be on your side and make life pleasanter to you."

Drusilla smiled.

"Don't let none trouble about me. I'm going my own way, and I know where my best happiness lies. Listen and don't talk. I understand how 'tis, and we needn't hide anything—you and me. Mr Snow's uncle wants him to wed with you. And what d'you say about it?"

Audrey started. The other spoke without passion or even animation.

"I—I? What a question!"

"Maybe I've no right to ask, but 'tisn't strange that I should be interested. You see, Timothy wanted to marry me, and I wanted to marry him, and we were tokened. But I changed my mind, and decided that it would be better if we broke off the match."

"I know—everybody knows. Of course it was your business, though the folk felt curious to hear why."

"My business, as you say; and the why don't matter.

At any rate, 'tis an ill wind that blows kind to nobody. I hope you want him, and will have the wit to win him. 'Twill be the right and proper thing to happen, by all accounts."

"That's a funny way to look at it," declared Audrey. "'Tis for him to win me, I should think, not for me to win him; but I'm none too wild on him, I assure you—not now. I don't care for anybody else's leavings. Do I look like the sort that would be content with second-hand goods? No—Timothy might have made love to me, for there's them that wanted it to be so, but 'tis too late now."

"Maybe grapes are sour with you," said Drusilla; and it was the other's turn to smile.

"Don't you think that. I'm not that sort. I don't know what's in his mind since you threw him over; I only hear he's terrible savage about it. But he may offer later on, and if he does I expect I shall say 'no' to him. Our old men have been a bit too busy, I reckon. You can't plan things for a girl like me, or a man like Timothy. All the same, I'd dearly like to know why you chucked him."

Drusilla regarded her.

"I suppose you would," she said. "Well, you can know this much. It wasn't through no fault of his that I did so. A woman's a woman, and her mind's often a mystery to herself, and I'm not going to say that I even know myself why I felt called upon to throw him over. But I did, and I angered him very bitterly, and made him hate women in general; and that's what I meant when I said I might do you a good turn. I can tell you just what's in his mind, and just how you ought to act if you want to be his friend and comforter."

"Thank you for nothing," answered Audrey. "You mean it kindly, but that knowledge is no good to me. I'm sorry for any man in his fix; but I've got no use for him now—at least——" She hesitated, argued with herself as to whether she spoke truth, and convinced herself within the space of half a minute that she did. "No — there's no doubt. I'm positive—positive. He's nothing to me, and I don't want to be his friend, and I

can't be his comforter. I've got a pinch of pride, too. He's been barely civil to me. I don't want him any more than you do. You know him better than anybody, and you've chucked him. You won't say why, but you did, and that's a danger-signal for us others. When a man's been thrown over at short notice by a sensible, quiet sort of girl like you, there's a very good reason. 'Tis a black mark against him."

Drusilla listened, and perceived that Audrey certainly entertained no sort of love for Timothy Snow. Interest she admitted, and the elder doubted not that such interest would have ripened into love if encouraged to do so. But the man had cared nothing for Audrey, and Drusilla began to see now that Audrey's incipient emotions with respect to him were finally dead. To what purpose, then, had been her sacrifice? The spectacle of its utter futility plunged her into silence, and she pursued her thoughts for a while.

Then came a man along the footpath. It was Amos Kingdon, the head-keeper at Yarner. He had heard that Drusilla's aunt was dead, and expressed his satisfaction.

"She'd stood enough," he said. "Few as ever I met have suffered so much. She made a proper fuss about it certainly, but that was her way. I hope she'll have all she expected, poor soul."

"Perhaps you'll tell me a bit about your under-keeper, Mr Kingdon," said Audrey. "I'm here with a message from his uncle, but I don't want to trapse all the way down to the bottom of the hill if you'll give it for me."

"Not you nor me can give it," said the old man. "For why? Because Timothy Snow, and his mother along with him, left Yarner last night. The cart came up from Bovey for their goods, and they was off and away before ten o'clock. I lent a hand, for that matter."

"Gone!" cried Audrey.

"Gone for good. I'm a little in his secrets, but can't tell 'em again, because I've promised not to do so. He saw Sir Percy ten days ago, put his case very strong, and asked to be let off at short notice; and Sir Percy, as never cared for the man's manner, between ourselves, was

quite willing for him to go. Not that you could say of Snow that he was ever rude or upsome to his betters, but he only just missed it. Terrible independent, as you'll bear me out. And the quality—such few as be left nowadays—don't care too much for that take-me-or-leave-me manner. Snow was a good keeper and a good fellow, but he'd got a way of talking as if 'twas a question whether he or the Almighty was the better man, and Sir Percy didn't care about it." Then Kingdon turned to Drusilla. "I say these things afore you," he continued, "because you know the truth of them better than anybody."

"But his uncle! Whatever will he say?" asked Audrey. "He'll cut him off with a shilling, I should think."

"He won't like it, for certain," admitted the keeper; "and so sure was I that he wouldn't, that I called upon Timothy very forcible to be less rash and reckless. However, he'd lost himself a bit owing to his misfortunes, and because he's took it very much to heart this maiden couldn't marry him. He was at war with life, you might say, and cruel bitter and biased about it. You see, he'd gone trampling along so cheerful and certain of hisself, and so fond of preaching to everybody. Excellent sense he preached, I'll grant, for he was a very clever young man; but a preacher's an irksome pattern of companion outside his proper place in the pulpit; and a young man that preaches make the people impatient. Because how the mischief can he know? And now he'll stop preaching and do a bit of larning instead. And so he'll ripen and grow a bit more mellow, and a bit gentler with them that err, and come back to God again, we'll hope. And the next maiden he offers for will find him humbler than what Drusilla here did."

"He was humble enough to me—always."

"You turned him going, however, and I daresay he'll profit by it, though he's lost you."

"He'll never offer again, you mark me. He's much too proud to ask another girl after this," said Audrey. "In fact, the wonder to me was that he ever found a girl to make him so far forget his grand self as to love

at all. He's a fine chap, and I always allowed that frankly enough, though he couldn't abide me."

They talked a while longer, and their speech stabbed Drusilla with every word of it; but for a time, dazed and inert, she endured. Pain was her portion henceforth, and she had become indifferent to it since the end was in sight. She prepared to leave them presently, and when, their thoughts brought back to her by her departure, Audrey and Mr Kingdon asked her the nature of her own plans for the future, she replied that she did not know as yet what she should do.

Her grief and suffering were very apparent—the others spoke of it when she was gone. The man startled Audrey Leaman and opened her eyes, for he was not unintelligent, and guessed pretty accurately at the truth.

They spoke of Lot Snow, and the keeper suspected that he was at the bottom of the tragedy.

"We all know him," he said—"a deep chap, who never lets his right hand know what his left is up to. But I'll wager he saw the only way to get Timothy off her. 'Twasn't any good going to him, so the old fox goes to her. 'Tis him that's made her chuck his nephew, and now he's going to reap the last reward he expected. Clever though he is, he reckoned without his host when he thought to make Timothy Snow do his bidding like a sheep-dog. 'Tis all up now, and he won't ever find out where Master Timothy's gone, I daresay. And even if he do, 'twill be above his power to fetch him back again, or alter his plans. 'Tis just one of those silly mistakes them that trust only to the power of money be so apt to make. He didn't know the nature he'd got to deal with, or surely he'd never have wasted such a lot of his precious time trying to buy what wasn't for sale."

But Audrey only considered the theory of the rupture.

"To think 'twas that, and I never guessed it!" she exclaimed. "What an old beast he is—Lot Snow, I mean. Now, if there's anything I be set upon to do in the world, 'tis to bring that man and woman together again!"

"Don't you be busy," advised Amos. "You keep out of it, or you'll have a hornet's nest let loose round your

ears. Them men have failed—your father and his uncle, I mean. As for the future, don't you meddle in it. If they be meant to come together again, come they will with no help from you. But I don't think 'tis in nature they should now. He's reached the raging stage, and properly hates her for chucking him without a cause. Of course, if he knew what I guess, he might repent and sneak to her again in a different spirit; but the thing's better left in Higher hands, in my opinion."

Youth, however, did not conform to this cautious view.

"Higher hands want human hands to help 'em, don't they? You're a silly, old coward, Mr Kingdon; and what's the use of being clever enough to see the truth, if you weren't plucky enough to show Timothy? You ought to have told him; and I shall, when I get the chance. Why, 'tis a cruel, beastly shame for her to sacrifice herself like that—and all for nothing. And you to have seen how 'twas, and kept your mouth shut!"

"On the contrary, I said a lot," declared the old man, "but I wasn't bound to air my secret opinions. How do I know I'm right? I may be wrong. Drusilla may have thrown him over for her own reasons, not Lot Snow's. You leave it alone, like a wise woman. Time enough for you to take a hand in it when you're asked to do so. So like as not, after he've digested this smack in the face, Master Timothy will look round and see worldly wisdom and come to you after all."

Audrey was indignant.

"I hate you old creatures!" she said. "You're all so mean and nasty and frozen at heart. You and father and Lot Snow—not a pin to choose. And if Timothy was to want me now, and go on his knees and pray to me to take him, I wouldn't. I'll shake you all up yet! 'Twill be a joy and pleasure to make you all sick and horror-stricken, and set you all crying out for shame and terror at me. And I will, too! I'm in love with a married man at present—a proper chap, whose wife don't understand him or know her luck."

He shook his head.

"Don't you talk like that, Audrey Leaman, or I shall tell

your father, and give him a warning to shut you up on bread and water for a bit. You young people of this generation be a proper handful ; and the next will be worse, by the look of it—and all on account of higher education, no doubt. They'm teaching the young an amazing lot of things now—almost everything you can name, in fact, but decency and modesty and manners and self-control and common-sense. Us shan't want them, I suppose, very much longer."

CHAPTER V

ON an evening in August the sudden departure of Timothy Snow and his mother from Yarnier made matter for lively conversation at 'The Coach and Horses.' Men of active mind developed theories concerning it, while those without imagination were content to listen and applaud their more acute neighbours.

A party discussed the matter at the hour of evening drinking, and Frederick Moyle indulged in some venomous laughter at Snow's expense. He rejoiced openly before the downfall of his enemy's hopes and ambitions.

"A facer for him!" he declared; "and well may the puffed-up fool hide his silly head. 'Twas pretty well certain to happen, for no sensible girl could have stood such a man for ever. No doubt she began to grow sick of his vanity, and saw through him, and flung him over. And then, being proud as Satan, he wouldn't stand the laugh he'd have to face for being too weak to keep her; and so away he ran, like a cur with his tail between his legs, and his mother spreading her apron to hide him."

"You're too acid, Frederick," answered Seth Campion, who drank at the policeman's elbow. "It don't become you to say these things, because we all know you bear the man a grudge. Ban't a very brave deed to laugh at his trouble like that. You be glad to see Fate hit him down; but you hadn't the pluck to hit him down yourself."

"You wait," answered Moyle. "You wait, old chap. I've not done with Master Timothy. My turn will come; and meantime I won't pretend I'm sorry he's had this hard knock. I'm glad, for he deserves it, the stuck-up, blustering bully."

Frederick's eyes flashed, and Mr Blackaller, from behind the counter, laughed at him.

"You be giving yourself away, policeman," he said, "and showing up afore these people as a silly creature full of spite, and not fit to stand for law and order. Of all men you ought first to keep your temper, yet, because this Timothy Snow very properly sent you packing out of Yarner, where you hadn't any business, and gave you a clip under the ear at the same time to hurry you along, you let it breed and fester and foul your mind, and you wish him evil, and be glad he's in trouble. You cut a very poor figure, Frederick, I assure you; and if you was a sensible man, you'd have been the first to hush up that bit of work, and let the laugh against you die. But by keeping up your hate against Snow, you keep up our memory of the reason, and that's a silly thing to do."

Mr Moyle scowled and reddened under this rebuke.

"I come here for beer," he said, "not advice from you, Ned Blackaller; and when I want your opinion of my character I'll ask for it. The man insulted me shameful without a cause; and I'll have my vengeance yet if I've got to wait a month of Sundays for it, and if you don't like what I say against him, you needn't listen. I wasn't talking to you, whether or no."

"You're out — out every way, Frederick," answered Blackaller quietly. "What's come between these young people we don't know, and what's made the girl change her mind we don't know; but 'tis a very sad thing for them both, and it don't become a decent man to delight in it, whatever he may think. I trust that Snow will show his sense, and do nothing rash or foolish. He's not a man to crumple up under trouble."

"That he's not," said Seth Campion. "A chap very well able to look after himself, and his mother the same. They'll be found to be all right. He knows his worth. He'll soon get more work."

Amos Kingdon, with a woodman from Yarner named Butt, entered at this moment, and Campion addressed the keeper.

"I'm saying that Timothy Snow's not the sort of man

to go begging, neighbour. He's left you, but he'll very soon find another job, if he haven't already done so."

"'Tis a rising mystery," answered the newcomer, "and me and Saul Butt, here, was telling about it all down the road. The girl's gone now — Drusilla Whyddon, I mean. I called but this morning to know if I could help her any way, and to hear when she meant to leave the cottage; but 'twas empty — all neat and tidy and empty. And something tells me she won't come back."

"And we met Miss Leaman on the way hither," said Butt, "and Mr Kingdon told her, and axed if she knowed anything about the girl, but she did not."

"'Tis easy to read that, I reckon," said the innkeeper; "and I'm glad to know what you say, because to me it looks as if her and Snow had made it up. Next thing we shall hear will be they're married, and he's got work well out of reach of this neighbourhood."

"He may try, but he won't get out o' reach of his uncle," said Moyle. "'Twill be all up with Timothy's future if he does it. Lot Snow had his ideas, and if the man don't fall in with them——"

"He's shown clear enough he won't," answered Black-aller, "and Mr Snow has seen it. I met him two days ago, and he was troubled. I didn't dare to name the thing, for he's not the sort of man that asks for friendship, or offers it; but I could see there was a deal of worry in his mind. He was short, and full of his private affairs."

"Mr Leaman's not so silent, however," said Campion. "He trusts me a good bit; and when 'twas known far and wide that the under-keeper to Yarner was off, Willes Leaman confided to me that it looked as if the careful plans of Mr Snow and himself were coming to nought. I said I thought so, too; and now if Drusilla Whyddon have cut her hook also, no doubt 'tis all up, and the young pair will triumph."

"Triumph and be cut off with a shilling," said Moyle; "and if what you say is true, Kingdon, then you may swear the whole row between her and him was a plant. They pretended to quarrel, to throw everybody off the

scent, and make they two old men think 'twas all coming right, and Timothy Snow would begin running after Audrey Leaman. But in secret they was friendly, and meant marrying so soon as Jenny Widger died. And that's how you'll find it comes out."

"And very sorry you'll be to think of 'em happy in each other's arms, won't you, Fred?" asked Butt, the woodman.

"Yes, I shall. I don't mean that man to have any fun I can prevent. My turn's coming, Saul Butt. I don't forget. I'll get my knife into him yet."

"Yes—into his back, I expect," said the woodman. "You haven't got the pluck to face him—more had any other chap about here. However, he's gone now, and won't come back, I reckon."

Amos Kingdon drank, and considered Moyle's theory of the event.

"I doubt you'm wrong," he said. "Ess, I feel pretty sure you'm wrong, Frederick. A policeman's opinion be worth weighing, since 'tis his business to put two and two together in the affairs of the neighbours, and help them to bide in peace and order; but your two and two—— No—I saw the girl but a few days since and spoke with her, and she weren't acting or pretending. She was flattened out and broken-hearted and properly wisht, with scarce a word to throw at a dog, as the saying is. She didn't know what she was going to do, and she didn't care. You couldn't mistake her low spirits and hopeless voice. She envied Jenny Widger the grave."

They discussed the matter with interest, and Mr Kingdon found himself alone in the opinion that Drusilla had not joined Timothy and his mother.

Then Campion opened another channel of interest, and declared that Lot Snow knew perfectly well where his nephew was gone.

"Old Lot was in along with my master but yester-night, and Miss Leaman sat along with 'em, and me and her be very good friends because I mind her gert dog for her; and, after Mr Snow went off, she spoke to me, and I made bold to ax if there was anything fresh in the wind. Then

she told me that she'd heard a bit and guessed still more. And she certainly thought from what Mr Snow had said, before they told her to clear out, that the old man knew where his nephew was. Of course you can find anybody, however close they hide, if you pay enough to the searchers."

"Did Mr Snow say anything as to Drusilla, I wonder?" asked Blackaller. "I've got a feeling, somehow, that we might find he knows a lot more about it all than any of us dreams."

"So far as Miss Audrey spoke to me, Drusilla's name was not named," answered Campion. "Of course she had not vanished away then, and nobody knowed any more about her than that she'd changed her mind and thrown over Mr Snow's nephew. But now that the girl's gone too, and left all her sticks in the cottage, no doubt 'twill all come out and the truth be known."

Meanwhile at Middlecot the news had reached other ears, and Willes Leaman started in the still evening hour from his farm to see Lot Snow. For Audrey, upon hearing from Kingdon that Drusilla had disappeared, hastened home with the news, and Mr Leaman thought that Timothy's uncle should hear it as soon as possible. It transpired that Lot had something to tell him also. Mr Snow bade his sister draw a quart of ale on Leaman's arrival, and then he began to talk.

"I'm better, thank you. No doubt you meant to ask about my health first, so you can know the answer, and I'll take your good wishes for granted. There's a bit of news. I've found out where that lunatic nephew of mine have got to. Not far off, neither. I suppose as I'd better ride over and talk to him; and yet, seeing that he has given us this taste of his quality, I'm in two minds to throw him over once for all. He's not the only man in the world, and I'm under no compulsion to make him my heir."

"Where is he?"

"He's at Drewsteignton for the minute, along with his mother. That girl—worth fifty of him after all, I reckon—that Drusilla Whyddon gave him up because, no doubt, looking on ahead, she couldn't see life unfolding very suent

along with him. And the result is that he's lost his self-control and bitched up his life like this."

"I did think when she chucked him, the cards were going to favour us," said Leaman; "but I'm with you now: we shan't get that man for my daughter, and so I feel no more interest in the matter. At Drewsteignton—eh? What a puzzle 'tis that my girl—with a string of men so long as the tail of a kite always running after her—couldn't take his fancy. Yet one can't let hope die very easy. Perhaps 'tis worth one more try. 'Tis very well talking about another man: where be you going to pick up a chap clever enough and sound enough to be your heir and mine? If you liked him, no doubt I should; but 'tis any odds against Audrey doing the same."

"Don't you say that. Audrey be a very clever woman indeed, and I think the world of her, and if I was forty instead of over sixty I'd marry her myself."

"I believe she'd marry you now," declared the father; "and then, if you was to rise up a son, it might be all right yet."

"No doubt she'd marry me. 'Twould suit her down to the ground, a clever creature that she is!" declared Lot, smiling at the idea. "I could marry her, but could I manage her? And would the fine boy when he comed along take after me, or that curly-headed policeman I see along with her sometimes, or Sir Percy Champernowne's young grandson, or some other Tom, Dick, or Harry? No, no—your fine Audrey wants something very different from me. She's too fond of change of air to suit an old blade so rusty in the scabbard as I be. A dear, beautiful love-hunter she'll be—mark me!"

Mr Leaman was annoyed.

"You oughtn't to talk like that, Snow. She's no love-hunter but a very high-minded girl, and straight as a line."

"So she is," added the other. "Straight as a line—her own line; and that she'll always take. She's got a spirit above law and order; and I hoped that Timothy would have broke that spirit and contented her presently. But now—well, the question is, as you say, whether I shall see the man, or alter my will and forget him."

"I came up with news," said Leaman, "and you may as well hear it. That girl who chucked him has left Yarnier, and nobody knows where she has gone, though everybody thinks they know. 'Tis pretty generally held that she's changed her mind and gone back to him, and that he's forgiven her and made it up."

"Ah! So much for my trouble, then. But I doubt it. Yes, I doubt that a good bit—knowing the girl. A very strong, sensible girl, and religious, and a promising wife for somebody. If she's gone, I doubt whether 'tis to him. It may be to Redstone, who wanted her when he was gamekeeper. I wouldn't have no harm come to her, any way. No—she didn't go back, if I know her character. There—say no more—I'm sick of the subject, and won't hear another word upon it to-night."

"You'll see your nephew, however?"

"I may, or I may not. Nought's ever bothered me like this before, and 'tis a dirty trick of chance to send me for my own nephew, and my only one, the first man ever I met I couldn't get round to my way of thinking about things."

"If he's had his dose and starts to bide single and keeps so for a good bit, he might then begin to see which side his bread was buttered. As he gets older he'll take more thought for cash and comfort like all men," suggested Leaman.

"True, he might, and no doubt he will. But—no, no, no more of it. Drink and change the subject. There's Dury Farm—I shall have that in a minute now. Another plan foiled, I suppose."

"You'll be wise to let Redstone stop there and go on with it."

"I hear the fool be going to make me a money offer to let him off."

"Yes, he is—sold his sheep for it."

"Might have saved his trouble. I don't go down no more—least of all in that quarter. When our own flesh and blood have hit us so hard as Timothy Snow have hit me, and played the fool with high prospects and run against all good sense and wisdom, 'tis difficult to be patient."

The old man, seduced from his usual secretive and

saturnine outlook on life by recent physical suffering, grumbled on, and indeed began to bore Mr Leaman somewhat. His admiration for Lot Snow and absolute trust in the farmer diminished a little. He felt impatient to see the other so lacking in resource. It occurred to him that he might take the initiative henceforth, because he continued much to desire this match and did not regard the case as hopeless. He believed that at the bottom of her heart Audrey still desired to wed Timothy Snow, and felt that if indeed Drusilla had not returned to him, there was still a possibility of his being won to wisdom by way of obedience to his elders.

CHAPTER VI

THE mystery of Timothy Snow's disappearance was not protracted, and his intentions soon became publicly known. He designed to leave England, and his mother was to go with him. The decision had been come to swiftly, and their goods were already sold.

Snow's hasty action was the nervous response to his disappointment. He strove to keep Drusilla's unreason and cruelty before his eyes and lessen in that light the grief of losing her. He endeavoured as much as possible to dwell upon her callous indifference to his sorrow; he created a mental picture of her unstable character, and laboured to believe that he had escaped a danger. But he could not thus deceive himself for long, and at times, in the high light of a fierce agony that kept him sleepless, the past unfolded before him, and he remembered her sentiments, her gentleness, her thousand little revelations of devotion and love.

Then came a rumour to his ear that John Redstone, Drusilla's former flame, might tell him more about the truth if he would. Snow learned at a breath of Drusilla's disappearance and the new theory of it. He strove to believe, but did not succeed easily. He ransacked his memory with respect to the things that his betrothed had said of Redstone, and recollected that she always spoke of him with kindness, and had expressed lively sorrow that she had been called upon to make him sad. Snow dwelt upon this memory, and began to suspect that pity had ripened into a warmer emotion. He was subtle in his reasoning, and guessed that there had appeared in himself certain qualities to distract Drusilla; that the better she understood him,

the more she began to doubt whether he would make the husband she desired. He imagined her contrasting him with John Redstone, and his imagination, in some sort quickened by his trouble, was modest and even humble before the idea. He conceived that Redstone, perhaps, possessed qualities that had been overlooked by Drusilla until now, and that, seen in the light of his own overbearing and dominant nature, the other man appeared to an advantage not appreciated before.

Snow's lonely life and natural pride had prevented him from instituting comparisons between himself and others until his betrothal, and then arose a sub-conscious comparison between himself and Redstone which rather tended to elate him. It had arisen after his meeting with Redstone, when a decided attraction towards the other had awakened in him. He had seen himself the stronger, abler, wiser; but he had regarded John Redstone as likely to be an excellent friend and admirer. He thought of himself as leader, John as disciple, and a vague pleasure permeated his mind before the fancy. Now, however, the comparison cast him down, and its illumination was darkness to his spirit. He was not jealous, since his nature scarcely admitted the emotion of jealousy. He had ceased to desire Drusilla because he was now convinced that she did not desire him; but the deepest interest of his soul still revolved about her, and it was with difficulty that he restrained an inclination to visit Redstone and satisfy himself upon these many doubts before departure. But chance willed that accident brought the men together, and then Snow learned that he was mistaken.

Timothy met the master of Dury upon the Moor, while he rode from Drewsteignton to take leave of a friend a week before departure, and it was Redstone who stopped him and opened the conversation.

"Lucky we met," said John, "and I'll go beside you a bit if you please, for I've been wanting a few words with you terrible bad. You was very civil and kind to me a bit ago, and didn't know at the time I hated you like hell for getting what I'd tried to get and failed—I mean Drusilla Whyddon. But now—if you'll excuse me for touching such

a tender subject—now all that cared for her, and a many did, be in trouble, because there's a doubt and a darkness hanging over her affairs. First we heard that—that you and she wasn't tokened no more ; and then we heard that she'd made it up and that she was gone back to you ; and then we heard you was off to foreign parts, and yet no mention of her. And, taking one thing with another and feeling what I've felt for her in the past, I've been a lot put about by it, and should have sought you if I'd known where to find you."

He ceased, and Timothy stared at him. In half a dozen short sentences John had destroyed the whole fabric of his theories, and made it clear that he knew as little of Drusilla's movements as Snow himself.

His pride whispered silence, but it had been much shaken and weakened of late, and his nerve, unknown to himself, was about to betray him. He had fallen from his resolute and aloof attitude ; he even displayed a shadow of diffidence. Each man felt too much in earnest seriously to examine the attitude and bearing of the other. For a moment, as they talked together, neither was armed. They spoke as understanding friends faced with a common care.

"D'you mean you know nothing of her? D'you mean that since she left Yarner, five days ago, you've had no news of her?"

"Why should I?" asked Redstone. "I won't deceive you, and wouldn't if I could. I was terrible fond of her, and got pretty well knocked out when she had to chuck me. We was so very nearly of a mind, you see, that it made it worse. She took me as near as damn it, you might say. We saw alike in a lot of things, and she knew, and never denied it, that I'd make her a good husband. But just the spark to catch all on light wasn't in her, and she wouldn't marry me. Then you come along and got her. But, though she wasn't for me, I couldn't but love her all the same ; and I always shall do so—through thick and thin, Timothy Snow, because I'm built that way. I was terrible interested to hear you had fallen out, and I won't say but I might have felt a shadow of hope in me again. But 'twasn't for me to come forward at such a ticklish time, and I didn't.

And when you ax me if I know anything of her, I say I don't. I see'd her at her aunt's funeral, and that's the last time I did."

The other made a confession.

"I wish to God we'd met sooner, then, for this is a very serious thing you tell me. I can trust you. 'Tis like this: she threw me over. No reasons—wouldn't give 'em, though I fought for 'em as hard as a man can fight a woman. She wouldn't give 'em, and in shame I could ask no more. I stooped as never I thought I could stoop; but 'twas useless. And then I left Yarner, because this thing has knocked the bottom out of my life for the minute. But I'm getting all right now. I'm glad she found out that she'd got no use for me before it was too late; and I reckon the reason was that my character turned out different from what she hoped. And then it struck me as likely enough she'd turned back to you."

"She never came to me, and I know nothing of her. In my turn I thought, and a good many others thought the same, that you'd made it up, and that she'd gone back to you secretly, and that the next thing we should hear was you were wedded."

Silence fell then between the men. Each pursued his own reflections, and each became self-conscious before the other. The interest that had existed, while there was a possibility that one or other had won back Drusilla, now shifted when they discovered that neither had done so. But whereas hope wakened in the younger man's breast, Timothy felt none. His uncertainty respecting Drusilla was not vital to himself. Indeed for the moment he cared less than he expected to care. He did not feel the same intense interest as Redstone. To Snow it mattered not much where Drusilla was gone so that she was gone from him; to Redstone it signified a great deal, because Drusilla must now be free again and her future absolutely undetermined. His nature made him always strive to clear every question that rose between himself and his fellow-man, and though now he longed to be alone with his thoughts, he would not leave Timothy without an endeavour explicitly to define the situation between them.

"Let's part with all understood, then," he said. "I think a lot of you, and I was sorry for you when I heard you and her had fallen out, because I knew what I'd been through myself, and could see, even with my weak wits, that your case might be even worse. But how is it now? You see, where there's life there's hope, and I ban't going to pretend I won't have another dash at her if she's free again. You'll excuse my open speech, for I mean no disrespect by it. Only if you and she be out once for all—then I shall feel I ban't doing either of you any wrong if I come forward to her again. Things look better with me. I shall see your uncle come presently, and can offer him a very tempting dollop of money to let me keep Dury. I've made great sacrifices, and I do think, as man to man, he'll be just and fair at the last. But I won't trouble you with my affairs. I'll only ax you, respectful and straight, if 'tis all over between you and her. And if it is—then that's where I shall try again; and if it isn't, I trust you be as honest as me and tell me plain."

Snow reflected. He saw the glow of hope and the tension and excitement of this possibility transform the other, and he brooded bitterly upon it. But it was hardly possible to resent Redstone's attitude.

"She left me of her own free will. She dropped me and has made no effort to explain," he said. "Do what you please, and find her if you can. I have no right to come between her and anybody."

"That's sporting, and I thank you," answered the other. "I won't forget that. I owe you something for that. It isn't every man would be so straight at such a time. And I'll be as straight. If I get to her, 'tis like enough I'll not find she can abide me any more than she used to. And if I find as she wants you still——"

"Stop!" said the other. "You mean well, but I can't stand no more of this. I'm a man with a man's pride and passions. I'll have no go-between between Drusilla Whyddon and me—least of all you. You mean well, but you're excited, like a dog that sees a bone where he looked for nought, and you're saying things you oughtn't to say."

If you find her, then respect me and keep my name off your lips. I've confided in you, because there was that in me told me I might. We shan't meet no more, and let me trust you to do nothing nasty behind my back. Never you breathe my name to her when you find her, and never you let her breathe mine to you. I won't suffer it. Why she chucked me is known to her, and none else on God's earth that I can think of. And if anybody is to know, it ought to be me. But the time's past. You understand that. I was interested to hear if she'd gone back to you; now I'm not interested in anything about her. I've done with her for evermore now—for evermore. She's tortured twenty years off my life, and I've done with her. But don't you probe her feelings on my account, or seek to know her reasons for leaving me, for that would be a dirty trick, and I should hate you to do it. You play for your own hand and win her if you want her, but keep me out; and if she name's my name, bid her be silent. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and the other shook it.

"'Twould be a fine thing to be so brave as you," he said. "I'll bear in mind what you've spoken. I'll do nothing that ban't honest and above-board."

Snow rode away, and Redstone dismissed him from his mind instantly. The position with respect to Timothy was now clear enough. He would soon be no more than a memory, and John resolved to respect that memory and remember all that Snow had said. But now his thoughts returned to Drusilla, and there woke in him a passionate longing that he might display sufficient strength and power of service at this crisis in her life, to win her.

"If I can't get her, I might be useful to her," he reflected; and that idea brought the immediate future to his mind.

"Where the devil be she got to: that's the first question," he said. Then he began to fear for her.

Meanwhile Snow went on his way, and he, too, within the space of five minutes of leaving Redstone, asked himself the same question. He could not banish old memories and deep-rooted emotions in a moment, for

all his high words to the other. He declared to himself that henceforth he cared nothing for the future of Drusilla, but none the less there now woke dread that misfortune had overtaken her. For her sake and not his own he went perturbed upon his way. It was psychologically true that he cared far less for her now that she had made it clear she cared not for him ; but it was also true that her future vitally interested him, and that he could not patiently regard the thought of leaving England without learning what had befallen her.

CHAPTER VII

Now did Varner spread, equipped and uncurled, to her last expression of splendour. She was fully decked, and offered a wondrous canvas for the painting of light and darkness, twilight and dawn. Her barriers and planes of foliage allured the sun and moon; at her covert edges the leafy shields of the woods were grown almost impenetrable where they fell and feathered with many a pensile bough to shroud the regions within. Light homed still under the trees, as it had done in spring and winter; its lances and banners still penetrated, and forced a rain of August gold into the secret places. The forest was pervious to light and rain; the fern glades basked and exuded a hot savour, and the thing now so solid and lumpish looked down upon from above, was in truth full of sunshine and motion and music. While unlovely to human eye gazing from afar; while dwarfed and rounded into heavy contours by the foliage; while dull and uninspired under their prevalent, sulky green, the woods viewed from within were pleasant and cool, murmurous with delicate noises, and restful to the spirit of man. The fern spread shadowy under the trees and basked in the light of clearings; it brooded in slopes and planes; it laced and splashed the underwood with a carpet of chequered brightness. Beneath it trembled little yellow flowers, the malempyre and loose-strife of the woods; while where the brake gave way to heath and whortle, the one shone with a rosy inflorescence and the other was rich in small black fruit.

The forest proceeded with its cycle of phenomena in punctual procession and ordered plan. Everything was happening as it had happened before and would happen

again. Those inevitable mischances and mishaps on which were founded other prosperities and successes filled the wood. The great ants lifted their mounds, and their larvæ were food for birds; the tattered foliage and stripped bough told of full-fed grubs; the ichneumon, poised like a gold bead in a sunbeam, meant death to the caterpillar's resurrection; the briar's incised foliage told of a carpenter bee's snug home; the scattered plumage of a red-breast revealed the feeding place of a hawk; from unseen corpses death struck upon the nostrils; and everywhere, under the silent splendour of drowsy days and moonlit nights, the battle raged. The paramount instinct to preserve life at any cost to other life quickened every activity, and swept like a pulse, like a fire, like a tide through the veins of the forest to keep all things in healthy sweetness of existence and progression.

Yarner's mystery continued impenetrable; its beauty lay alone in the beholding eye; its very quality of impersonality belonged not to itself but the appraising mind. Fairly enmeshed and engulfed in the forest, humanity proceeded as through a labyrinth without a clue; and only by a simulated sentiment or self-deception could man be said to add one joy or modify one sorrow by intercourse with its unsorrowing and joyless entity.

Knowledge of such a thing dwells outside power of words; the meaning must be missed—it may be by a hair's breadth; it may be absolutely, owing to qualities beyond attainment of human reason or feeling. Yet reason and feeling both hint at times that the meaning lies nearer than one might guess; that indeed it may presently flash upon some human spirit as a whole, instead of fitfully in side-lights. For now the meaning twinkles across our darkness, as a firefly through a southern night: only to be withdrawn in the moment that it is perceived; but the unborn may probe to reasons, if reasons there are.

Among the recesses of Yarner there stole the secret, solitary figure of Drusilla Whyddon: and she came to die. Circumstances have displayed her as one well content in the high happiness of a perfect and unclouded love. But, since the sudden demand put upon her love, the world was

changed, and her own nature declared itself. It proved a weak one, as might have been anticipated from certain glimpses already observed of her character and unusual imagination. And imagination it was that now dominated her mother-taught conscience, made light of her religion, and declared most definitely that for her was only an alternative between her lover and death.

She stood as the apotheosis of a love at once triumphant and defeated. She had ensured the man's welfare at the cost of her own destruction, for she cared not to live without him. Her passion, until now expressed peacefully, since the course of love had run so smooth, was none the less fundamental. It had swallowed up all other interests and emotions of life; it had enveloped her with a garment of pride and joy; it had embraced her soul and lifted her into an upper world of absolute contentment. She had been steeped in the full glory of it, and earthly life became thereby transformed into a reality above all former dreams of heaven. Like sunshine and music the emotion had swept over her uneventful, silent days. The transformation was complete and stupendous; the hopes and anticipations were without measure; and the crushing necessity to relinquish all came with tragic force. For its highest expression love had demanded complete surrender. It had called her to yield up all that she worshipped in the man, and all that she hoped for from him. She had risen to the height, denied him, dismissed him dumbly raging and in ignorance of her motives; and now she was empty, exhausted, sick of existence and eager to live no more.

The struggle to shut him out had been terrific, and the temptation to tell him her reason and so not lose his love, had been very great. But the circumstances of the case demanded that the truth should not reach her lover, and she concealed the truth at awful cost of energy, nervous power, and self-control. Now all was ended, and her strength to suffer had gone. That he would never know she had died for him was once a grief to her; but even that reflection left her indifferent now. She dragged her body into the untrodden places of the forest and

sorrowed only that it was not winter; for then she had passed away the more quickly.

Her strange act was to conceal herself in the woods beyond possible power of discovery. Indeed, until the present no search had been instituted, because the few interested in Drusilla's affairs supposed that she was safe with friends and would presently be heard of. None troubled about her; and she meantime deliberately faced starvation.

In the earlier stages of her suffering, when sleep still served her by night, she entered upon a calenture and excitation of mind — a sort of fevered inspiration in which she fancied that she saw the truth of all things, and imagined that delirium was revelation. The manifestations of the forest became more significant, and the phantasies woven of incipient starvation, with its whirling images and wild scenery of dreams, began to open as it seemed to her into the ways of peace. And above all, Death, that she had dreaded and recoiled from, when he met her senses through sight or stench, now lost his terrors and stalked friendly by her side. He was indeed her only friend. She forgot the friends that she had, and did not remember that her way of life and generous sympathies for suffering had raised up for her many friends; she ignored the two men who would have saved her thankfully at cost, if need be, of their own existences. Her quailing intellect reduced all to a point, and she conceived Death as a creature in shape of man, a being not uncomely, who was watching her from the brake and holt, and who, under some still night of stars, would presently steal to her side and take her life into his keeping. She thought little of any future, and chose rather to hope that no such thing existed. She remembered Timothy's doubts upon the question, and trusted that he might be right: because all that for which she now panted was dreamless slumber and everlasting surcease.

She found the outlet of an audit on the hill side some distance from the old mine, and here she crept by day; but the place was dark and foul. It dripped with water, and ugly insects infested it. She would not die there, and a

desire came to her to pass under the sunlight in some uplifted place, where her last conscious look might be upon the clouds. She knew of such a place, and, waiting until nightfall on the fourth day of her fast, she crept thither, doubting whether she still had strength to scale the height of it. Thus far she had drunk of the streams of the wood; henceforth she would drink no more. Her design was to reach a spot from which it would soon be impossible for her to descend.

On the day before this action some instinct had drawn her to the gamekeeper's 'larder' in the wood, and she sat beneath the spot where vermin were crucified upon a board between two trees. Predatory beasts and raptorial birds hung here—the lean carcase of a stoat and three weasels; the rotting shapes of hawks and magpies; the dishevelled splendour of a jay. She gazed upon them, envied them and saw no horror but only beauty in the revealed framework of bones and pinions. Some of the skeletons were stripped by time, and glistened through the rags and tatters of their ruined pelts and plumage.

This place was much secluded, and visited but seldom. Her surprise, therefore, was great when she heard some one approaching. Her heart stood still, her spirit sank, for the footfall was familiar, and she knew that Snow stood at hand. She hid where brake fern grew high beside an oak; she crouched low and held her breath till the sound of her heart beat up into her head like thunder. Then he came out into the space beneath the gallows-tree and stood there not twenty yards from her.

Had consciousness persisted she might have yielded and approached him, but it did not. Chance and her own condition relieved her of that final torture, and the tension of the moment quite subdued her. She fainted and slipped gently down into the fern, silent as the raindrop or the wing of an alighting owl.

The man knew nothing of what had fallen out so near him. He strode here and there uneasily for a little while, with care on his face; then he went away to seek elsewhere, in private nooks sacred to Drusilla, for some sign or token of her. He had heard that none knew where she could

be found, and, suspecting from his knowledge of her nature that she might still be in her old haunts, he was come secretly to search for her. He had forgiven her, and explained a part of her conduct. Much of her past morbidity occurred to his mind. He remembered puzzling moods and strange whims. He recollected her peculiar imagination and her fancied kinship with the forest; and he guessed that she must be mad. Given this awful catastrophe, he believed that she might wander in secret until she died, and now he went here and there through the woods bracing himself to come upon her dust.

Since this conclusion, that she was no longer sane, a deep agony of sympathy had grown up in Snow for Drusilla. Until then he had hated her for deserting him; but since the discovery that she had sought no other and must still be alone, his mind was changed towards her, and not the least part of his suffering centred in the recollection that he had misjudged her. For his pride there was a sort of consolation in the fancied discovery that madness had made her cease to love him; but for his love the thought of this tragedy and the spectacle of Drusilla alone, concealed, with her brain broken and death waiting for her, made the man frantic.

He had come to Amos Kingdon and explained his fear. He had then searched the woods without avail. This was his third scrutiny. One more day he designed to devote to further quest, then his plans required that he left England for ever. Now he was torn in half, and dreaded to go while still in doubt of her fate. His agitation and misery were extreme, and his self-control for the time had almost deserted him.

Another uncertain duty awaited the man before he departed. He felt the need to see his uncle once more, and inform him that he was about to leave the country. This task he intended to postpone until the day before he sailed.

He and his mother would leave Plymouth for Canada within a week, but none knew it, and none were to be told save only Lot Snow and his sister.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the eastern hills of Yarner, at the edge of fir plantations, and beneath a great heath that spread to the horizon above, there stood the ruined mine in a wood of silver birch. Fifty years before, copper had been sought and found here; but the enterprise languished; the mine was deserted, and more than the mournfulness of human failure haunted the glen and ruin, because a man had hanged himself against the wall of a roofless chamber. For years his bones were undiscovered, then a truant boy, climbing for jackdaw's eggs, came across the litter of the carcase under a rope's end that still swung above it.

The place stood on a slope, and beneath it fell ugly banks of ironstone, that half a century had failed to hide. These mounds persisted ungainly, and defied foothold to all green things. Round about fragments of wrought iron and rotten timber told of past industry; but the wood fast returned to earth, and the *débris* of red metal was rusted, twisted, fretted by the teeth of time. The spokes and splinters thrust out of the undergrowth and stone, like fossil skeletons partially denuded. At hand in the woods the main shaft had been sunk, but it was now choked up and not forty feet deep. A litter of weed and rubbish filled the bottom, with the white bones of a horse, that had fallen in by night and perished there. The chimney still stood and towered over the birches. It sprang from a mass of masonry beneath, and stood above a deep pit, where floods had laid bare the foundations until it seemed that the huge mass of stone and brick must soon topple. It frowned and threatened, and promised at no distant date to crash upon the forest slope and relieve the landscape of this unsightly stack.

Surrounding roofs, that had covered the machinery, were rotten, and had dropped in many places so that the grass-grown floors were littered with tiles and strewed with a rib-work of rafters. The chimney towered intact, but its red bricks were eaten away, and the wind had crowned it with dancing feathers of fern. Over the pit projected two great masses of mortared stone, like the fretted paws of a sphinx, and grass and dandelions covered each nook and cranny. Great cracked arches opened above, and fallen walls had left a splintered jag of steps, by which a climber might ascend to the secret chambers aloft. Here nested wild birds, and the broken floors were littered with rubbish and filth of empty nests. The birches had grown all round the ruin, and rowan and hazel found harbour in its walls. They thrust forth from the stone-work, and beneath them in the dark places lolled out the tongues of ferns, trailed wild briars, fruited the dog-rose and stole the ivy, with silent sure fingers, first to clothe and then to drag all down.

The place possessed no might or majesty. It spoke of no spiritual catastrophe or downfall of the great. It shared not with shattered sanctuary or castle the power to wake emotion before the spectacle of the all-devouring. It was no more than a hideous ruin of commercial enterprise. It waited only, as such ruins are apt to wait, for the passing of the generation who had confided in it and been disappointed. Then it promised to stablish its tottering foundations anew on the spirit of human hope awakened by greed; and fresh manipulators would once more use the thing to charm capital from new adventurers.

Even such a fate now dawned for the sinister ruin, and Lot Snow, familiar with like experiments on Dartmoor, and aware that the promoters come well out of such enterprises, though the shareholders may not, had vague ideas of seeking power to float a small company and reopen the mine.

Twice in secret he had visited the place—and now he prepared to come again. It was his way to kill two birds with one stone when it might be done. He had therefore planned to meet John Redstone at a spot very familiar to the former gamekeeper; and he hoped to win more advantage from John than his debtor was likely to win from him.

Because Redstone knew the mine; he could show Lot more than he had yet seen, and possibly explain certain things that the elder did not understand. Chance thus brought three people—a woman and two men—into contact; but the men might have come together and parted again, without knowledge that another was so near, had not accident proclaimed it and tangled two lives inextricably from that moment for ever.

For hither crept Drusilla Whyddon, and spent her failing physical forces in climbing the steps furnished by the broken walls. At risk of a slip and instant death she made to the summit, and crept to a lofty place open to the sky, where none would ever seek her or dream a girl might hide. To descend was soon impossible in her condition. She sank down there, and for a time became unconscious after the effort of climbing. Then thirst—slaked till now—awoke keen suffering, and she perceived that those physical agonies she had supposed at an end, were yet to fall upon her. For a long night she endured torment and moaned in delirium. With morning she had grown weaker, and at evening of that day her torture was somewhat less. For many hours the sun beat upon her and rendered her comatose. Now it had gone, and she was conscious, but powerless to leave the place wherein she lay. Her mind mirrored her body after her death. She thought of her flesh feeding the jackdaws that kept up their clink and clatter round about her; she saw her hair lining the nests of the little birds when spring should come again. She was glad to be dying here, where she had lived. Her thoughts grew very peaceful before the sunset, and she sank toward euthanasia as her torments waned.

At this hour it was that John Redstone met Lot Snow in the forest. The younger had come early, had tethered his horse beside the mine, and then roamed the familiar wood and sought, as Timothy Snow had sought, among special nooks and haunts with which he associated Drusilla. He was perturbed above measure at her loss, and his own affairs sank to small importance before this more serious matter. But the time came for the appointment. He returned to the mine, and Lot Snow, on a stout pony,

met him there. He had been standing beside Redstone's horse for five minutes, and was in no amiable mood.

"I hope you be better," began the younger; "'tis said you've been sick for this longful time."

"Sick? Aye, enough happening to make any sane man sick. The ways of the fools—the ways of the fools up and down in the earth. Lord! how they swarm! Where was you when I came up?"

"Hunting—hunting for that girl—her as meant to marry your nephew and changed her mind."

"I've just come from speaking with the idiot," said Lot. "God's truth, I smarted to lay my hand on his ear. Never in the whole course of my life did I meet man or woman that could make me lose my temper—not till to-day. Pig-headed, obstinate wretch! Just because that girl threw him over, he's going to give up all and leave England. Has booked his passage, and no power less than force will keep him. I've talked more sense to that senseless thing and wasted more words upon him than ever I talked or wasted afore. And now he may go and strew his bones where he pleases. I've done with him for ever—him and his mother also. She was a canny creature once, but he's ruined her—as often a son will ruin a mother. Now you may show me about this place. I've got the captain of a mine coming up to see it next month, and I want to know what you can tell me."

"There was a chap who died at Manaton a bit ago. He worked here in his young days, when the mine was going," answered Redstone. "He'd come over and look at it now and again, and he showed me how it all went afore it tumbled into ruin. A busy place, and very near a hundred men on it once, above ground and under. It found work for 'em, and all went very well till the shareholders got tired of waiting for a bit of their money back; then the thing was given up."

"That's the way. But every generation brings its own hopeful fools, and there's always plenty ready to go into a mine. You catch 'em underground—like the blind moles. You can pay some chap to write a report—that's the bait; and all depends upon it."

"'Tis a queer old rogue's roost of a place now. If you come this way I'll tell you so much as I know about it. Best pick your steps careful, however, for the stones are loose and slippery, and you ban't built to take a tumble very easy."

The survey lasted ten minutes, and then Lot Snow, now interested in his own thoughts, prepared to depart. He had forgotten the other's business.

"So much for that, then," he said. "Now I can tell that mine captain how 'tis with the place, and we'll knock our heads together. Hold my pony, will 'e, while I get up."

"You're a cool hand, for all your fat," said John. "I'll ax you to bide a minute, please, and do my business now I've helped you so well as I know how to do yours. I've been awful patient, master."

Snow laughed.

"I'd forgot that. But you use the right words. I have done your business, and very well you know it. You be your father's son, and so all's said. I'm not going down any more. I'll have my own way in that matter though the devil was against me. So 'tis no good you kicking against the pricks—none whatever."

"But the case is altered—altered every way. You must have heard tell what I've done to meet you. I've sold my sheep—all they Dartmoors crossed with Scotch—and there's two hundred and twenty solid pounds, and that's very near a quarter of the debt."

"More fool you. What's the sense of that? And 'tis all one whether or not, because I should have taken 'em over with the mortgage. If you'd read your lawyer's papers or gone to him, for that matter, you'd have saved your time and trouble. You don't deserve consideration. You're an idiot like the rest."

"You can talk so! Don't you see that I've strained every nerve and done all a mortal man knowed how to do to meet you? Surely to God you'll do your share now—you that are rich and strong? What more can any man think upon? There's two hundred and twenty solid pounds——"

The other laughed again, and showed enjoyment at Redstone's chap-fallen countenance.

"What stuff be you made of? Lath and plaster, I should think. Can a grown man be so soft? Your father was cleverer than you—and harder. 'Tis more'n you'll do to work off the legacy he left you when he insulted me. He ought to have thought upon what a soft thing you were before he said what he said. But I reminded him at the end: that's some satisfaction. And now—get so hot as you please, and stick out your jaw so far as 'twill go, 'tis all one. Dury han't going to have a Redstone for a master after Christmas. I'll get my pound of flesh off you, my boy—full measure, too. I be Lot Snow still, I believe. I ban't going down all along the line, and if my own nephew——"

He scowled to himself and was silent, while the other man's temper broke free. It sprang like water from a sluice and soon drowned his self-control.

"What a gert hulking coward you be! Always making war on the weak—never on the strong. You cut and run afore your betters like any trundle-tale cur, but where women or the poor are the matter you bluster and bully. And after all I've done! God damn it, don't you grin in my face no more, or I'll hit you down!"

Redstone's rage affected his voice; it sank into an angry growl. As for Snow, he was glad to retort in kind, and his voice rose with his passion.

"Would you, you red hound! Have a care, or you'll lose more than your mud-heap you call a farm. I see you twitching on your horse-whip, but, old as I am, I can hit harder than you. The law's o' my side against all such penniless, worthless scamps as what you be, and you lift your arm again and I'll set policeman on 'e and have you where your father ought to have been if he hadn't died like a snivelling coward! Would you? Touch me and I'll get some decent men to flog the hide off your dirty back afore you'm a day older."

Redstone did not answer with words. He was now beside himself. He snorted and foamed at the mouth. A violent physical storm swept him; he swung his riding-whip with all his might, and, before the other could guard himself, brought the buckthorn handle down on Snow's left temple. The old man's hat shot into a blackberry

bush ; he flung up his hands ; he gave at the knees and fell backward heavily. One loud cry he uttered, and only one, but that sound terrified his pony, which started, strained at its rein and strove to get loose. It also reached the fading senses of the girl hidden forty feet above them in the ruin. It penetrated her consciousness and brought her back to momentary life. She heard a voice raised in savage frenzy after the scream.

"There ! you brutal wretch—that's payment for long scores ! And, please God, you're dead, and the world rid of you !"

Redstone lifted his eyes from the hulk at his feet and stared round him. He looked aloft and saw a spectre, as it seemed. A white-faced, dim-eyed thing stared down for one second ; then it sank back out of his sight. But he knew that he had seen Drusilla. The mass of Lot Snow's body still moved. The great figure had fallen supine ; it quivered still, and its arms and legs contracted. But they soon ceased to do so. The eyes were open and unseeing.

Redstone's mind moved quickly, and in his excitement he built up a wild theory of the situation. He fancied that it was the man at his feet who had brought Drusilla here and made her a prisoner aloft in the ruined chambers of the mine. He cried out to her, but received no answer. Then he cast about how best to reach her, and presently found the only means of climbing aloft. By the ruined wall he ascended and crept to her and found her perishing. The tremendous discovery meant more to him than all else in the world. The past vanished as a dream of no account ; the future alone demanded all his energy and powers ; he cared not whether Snow lived or died, he was only concerned with saving Drusilla if it might be done. She was not able to form her words, and he could not so much as tell if she recognised him and understood him. She babbled drowsily, and showed a disinclination to be moved. She struggled when he lifted her and struck him feebly in the face ; but he understood that her wits were gone and her life on tiptoe for flight. With immense care, and at no little risk to them both, he carried her down. Then, while the dusk of evening thickened through the woods, he lifted

her on to his horse and held her there. His whole soul poured itself out upon this rescue, and all other things were forgotten. The man at his feet had passed clean out of his mind. His action did not weigh upon him for one moment—either then or afterwards; he was primitive in all his instincts. He had fought nature hard in his endeavour to save his farm, and when all was lost he returned swiftly to himself by the short-cut of passion. Now faced with an apparent corpse, he cared nothing. By no act of his would any flicker of life be preserved for Lot Snow. But he mightily desired to save life for another, and the doubt whether he had power to do so made Redstone forget all lesser issues. He planned his route for home, set Drusilla on his horse, held her there until he had cleared Yarner, and then himself mounted. With Drusilla in his arms he traversed the Moor under the gloaming. He held on his road by lonely ways through wood and combe; he avoided every farm and hamlet; he crossed Hameldon, crept beside Grimspound, and two hours later reached Dury unseen. Not one thought did he bestow on Lot Snow during the journey, for every energy of his body, every throb of his brain, every beat of his heart was absorbed in Drusilla and the hope to save her alive.

CHAPTER IX

LOT SNOW had related to Redstone but a part of the recent scene between his nephew and himself. In an evil and malignant mood the man had listened to Timothy declare his immediate departure, and suffered his own disappointment and anger to take vindictive shape. So sharp was the strife between them that when the elder mounted his pony and rode off to keep his appointment with Redstone, the other had hastened up the street beside him, and only became silent when Mr Snow galloped beyond earshot. Threats passed, and Timothy's aunt, Sibella Snow, to whom he returned when his uncle had departed, for some minutes endeavoured vainly to calm the sufferer.

For Lot had not hesitated to declare that it was he who had prompted Drusilla to desert her betrothed; and that she had been glad to go to another man. He flouted Timothy with this lie, and assured him that his sweetheart would soon be safely settled in life and wedded to better than himself. They cursed one another in the open street, to the wonder of certain round-eyed children and an adult or two; then with the departure of Lot, Timothy returned to his aunt, listened to her words and grew cooler. She strove to bring a little peace to him, and declared that the things that her brother had said were not true.

"'Tis right, I expect, that he got the girl from you; but I'm sure it isn't right that he's found her a husband, or anything like that, and there's no call for you to believe it," said Sibella. "You go after him quick in a peacefuller frame of mind and beg his pardon, and part friends, not enemies. You've wrecked the hope of his life, and, as a man little used to being defied, it's made him savage and

furious. He's sick, too, else you'd never have seen him forget himself like that. He's properly ill, I believe, and the doctor knows it, and so does he. You go after him, so swift as you may, and ask pardon for your harsh words, and take a kindly leave of him if he'll let you. 'Tis your only chance after this quarrel. Then distance will soften him, and very likely make him forgive. And as for her—Drusilla—'tis very like he may have worked upon her to give you up, and said 'twas for your own good. 'Tis just the clever thing he would suggest to her, and the brave thing she'd do."

"But she would have told me."

"And spoiled all. Not she. If she strung herself up to throw you over, because he said you'd be ruined else, 'twasn't likely she could tell you her reason. But now, you see, your uncle has let out her reason. And a girl as could be brave enough for that, won't go back on it, you may be sure. There's hope, however, for if she finds, as she must, that you're going off to foreign parts, and won't fall in with your uncle's plans, despite all she's done—then what's to prevent her, come presently, from being your sweetheart again? She's standing out for your good, and belike she'll come back to you for your good. But the first step is for you to be friends with Uncle Lot. He knows now that you won't change, and when he cools down and uses his wits, he'll see that his cause ban't bettered by bullying you any further—or Drusilla either."

The man became excited again ; this time at the stimulation of hope.

"But we're leaving England to-morrow—mother and me."

"So much the better. There's nought softens the hard heart like distance, I tell you. I be your side, and you shall hear where Drusilla have got to so soon as I can find out from Lot. No doubt he knows all about her. And perhaps she'll come after you to foreign parts presently."

"How can I leave her behind, now I've heard this?" he asked ; but she bade him be gone.

"Don't you waste no more time here. Run after your uncle and sing small—so small as ever you know how.

Overget him if you can ; then tell him where you're going, and what you mean to do."

Timothy thanked her, and set out to do her bidding. Mr Snow was gone out of sight, but his nephew knew which way and hastened up the hill after him. The old man had won too great a start, however, and it was only by asking some labourers returning from their work that his nephew could follow the right road. Through Hey Tor Valley he went, and then lost the trail, for Lot had proceeded swiftly, and, despite his great bulk, pushed his pony against the steepness of the hill.

At the Moor edge the pursuer was at fault ; and then it happened that he saw Frederick Moyle. The man was on duty, and passed him with blank disregard ; but Timothy, now in some measure elated, forgot their enmity and addressed him.

"Have you seen my Uncle Snow up over?" he said.

Moyle, however, ignored the question and went on his way.

The fact reminded Timothy that he spoke to an enemy, and being now in no dark mood, but softened and even sanguine, he turned and walked by the other's side, and spoke to him.

"I'm going out of England to-morrow, and I don't want to leave enemies behind me. I ask your pardon for anything I've done amiss to you. All the same, Moyle, you know who was right."

But Frederick had nursed his wrath and kept it warm too long. It could not be cooled at this slight breath of contrition : nor did he desire it to cool. He only regretted the fact that Timothy was departing. He took no notice of the other's apology, but replied to his question.

"Lot Snow on his pony went across the hill yonder twenty minutes ago. You ask me as a policeman, and I answer as a policeman."

"I've had a stiff breeze with him, too," said Timothy. "And I want to make friends all round before I'm off. Good-bye, Moyle. I wish you well."

He got no answer, and went on by the track—a bridle-path over the Moor. For a considerable distance he

followed it; then it fell over the hills and presently came to the edge of Yarner. Here it entered the forest at a gate, where an ancient and broken tramway, with granite lines, wound through the side of the woods upon its circuitous journey from the quarries above to the vale beneath.

Timothy stood and considered for a while. He guessed that his uncle might be gone through Yarner as a short cut elsewhere. It remained only to descend through the wood, and try to overtake him before the night fell. He marshalled his thoughts and framed an apology. Then a human sound—a single, faint cry uttered far off—struck upon his ear. He strained to listen, but the noise was not repeated. That harm might have overtaken his uncle occurred to him, and he made haste down the woods in the direction of the cry. He thought that Lot Snow had possibly been thrown under the trees and injured. He stood at a spot more than half a mile above the mine, but now set out in that direction. As he went he found time to wonder what would happen if his uncle were hurt so far from succour.

Dusk was down, and the woods began to take the shadow of night's wings upon them before he reached the ruin. He was passing by it on a steep path when he came upon the bulk of Lot Snow's body, lying where it had fallen across the way. His skull was broken in at the temple, and he was dead. Twenty yards off stood his tethered pony, and by his side lay his riding-whip.

The effect of the discovery acted otherwise than might have been predicted, for Timothy Snow, during the crowded events of the last few weeks, had suffered from such strain and stress that his nerve and spirit were unsound. He, who had not dreamed that any chance of existence could find him unguarded and unarmed; he, who had proclaimed himself as safely through the danger zone; he, who had prided himself before Drusilla and others as one invulnerable, was at this juncture half drowned under the waters of life. He had felt himself torn many ways; he doubted his judgment, distrusted his instincts, went in grief and despair, wandered far from his old self-restraint and reserve, acted on impulse, and often found himself in two minds. But

upon this chaos, within the past hour, there had flashed an uncertain sunrise of hope ; and now so terrific and unexpected a catastrophe breaking suddenly upon this dawn, found the man in no case to approach it with fitting resolution and courage. It bewildered him. He stood staggered and dismayed. Here was no accident, but a great crime. He knelt by the corpse, and rose to find warm blood upon his knee. Then he became occupied solely with himself, and believed that chance had not only thrust him direct upon murder, but had also ordered events in such a way that for a moment at least he stood darkly shadowed at the very centre of the tragedy. He argued rapidly and even clearly. An enemy had met Snow by secret appointment and destroyed him, and that enemy must ere now be well on the road to safety. It was grown too dark, even had he desired, to make any search about the corpse. The thing itself had sunk into a colourless mound under the deepening shades. It might have been one of the great ant-hills that lifted round about.

Timothy's mind was quickly established, and actual, physical fear, finding his armour off, played a fierce part in the decision. He saw himself in peril, and contrasted that dark possibility with the beam of blessed hope so recently flashed upon his affairs. He had just heard precious news, and believed it ; he had just listened to Lot's sister, while she explained how Drusilla was tempted to desert him for his own good ; and he grasped the probability, and, knowing her, accepted it as the very trumpet of truth. Life was lifted to heaven in an instant, and whereas, before this immense discovery, the man had felt that he cared little as to his future, now all was changed, and the awakened chances of prosperity made him a coward. He decided that to pursue his plans, and leave England at once was the wisest course. He felt that the longer discovery of this outrage was delayed, the less might he be associated with it in men's minds. Because for the moment it was very well known, and that through certain independent witnesses, that he had quarrelled violently with his uncle. Thereupon he argued that he might reasonably assist the unknown doer of the deed to hide it !

His understanding was shaken; his mind whirled. Loose threads and flashes of thought, wild fears and frantic hopes, tangled themselves in his brain. The actual murderer had kept far more cool than he. A thing of all others least likely to have been predicted from this man's character happened, for time and chance had played such pranks with him that now, overcome by fear, desiring life and liberty as he had never before desired them, and looking to the future for salvation, he was moved to an extraordinary deed. Under the darkness Timothy Snow laboured to conceal the crime of another man's commission. For his great new-born hope he worked, and for the certainty of recovering that which was lost. He felt no shadow of sorrow for the old man thus tragically cut off; the sole, present purpose of his unsettled reason was to conceal all traces of the murder, and hide its victim from discovery. Not ten yards from where Lot Snow had perished there yawned a great hole in the ground. Once this aperture sank into the depth of the hill, but it had been filled in a great measure, and was now no more than forty feet deep. Hither Timothy dragged the dead and thrust him. Then he gathered litter of dry wood, with leaves and stones, and cast down a mass of some tons upon the corpse.

He presented the spectacle of a strong man struggling in surges of panic terror, and turned to a temporary poltroon by the accidents of life. He behaved like a murderer, toiled with the demoniac strength of one excited by a great crime and the threat of its retribution, erred in detail of forgetfulness just as an actual criminal under like circumstances might have erred. Lot Snow's whip he buried with him, but his hat he did not think upon or seek, because it was not visible. All done, he feared suddenly to stop another moment. Therefore he departed, but was inspired to lead away the dead man's pony with him, and release it far from the actual scene of the murder. He mounted, therefore, and rode it through the woods, past the empty house where he had lived with his mother, and liberated it half an hour later in the high moor that ran northerly beyond Yarnar.

That night Timothy wrote to his Aunt Sibella. He forgot to mention his destination, and merely said that he had followed but failed to overtake his uncle. Then, even as he posted his letter, it seemed that the juggling fiend so long responsible for his actions departed. Scales fell from his eyes, a cloud blew away from his intellect, and he saw the truth of the thing that he had done. The whole concatenation unfolded scene by scene before him. He retraced every step, and perceived how first his uncle's story had roused him into making foolish threats, how then Sibella's sense had allayed his anger, and shown that the woman he loved might still be within his reach. Upon that sudden after-glow of hope had fallen the terrific circumstance of his discovery, and the overmastering dread awakened thereby. From that moment, utterly unmanned, he had taken leave of himself and became as another being; at this juncture, driven by medley of emotions, tangled hopes and terrors, frantic desires to be safe, that he might yet win what he supposed was for ever lost, he had suffered a sort of possession, and run into the very peril from which he was striving to escape. Looking back, he appreciated the significance of his action and the appalling risks that he had taken. He believed that only the darkness of night had saved him. Even yet it was highly probable that the murder might be brought home to him. It looked but a short step from the thing that he had done to actual murder—so his intellect told him; and in the wild visions of the night that followed, he dreamed of himself as committing the crime, and then being hunted to the four corners of earth by outraged man.

Early the next day he and his mother departed from Drewsteignton to Plymouth, and since their address and the port of their departure was unknown to any living person at Ilsington, it proved impossible to inform them before they sailed that Lot Snow had not returned home on the evening of Timothy's last visit.

CHAPTER X

It was long before John Redstone devoted a thought to his own affairs, and then only events in the world reminded him of them. Even had his nature been of a sort to brood upon his action, and sink under that by-product of the Christian ethics called remorse, the immediate struggle for Drusilla's life must have obscured for a season events that to his mind were far less important. But the man's character declared itself after commission of this definite deed, and lifted him above any slough of despond or any dread of retribution. It is a fact that he hardly gave a thought to the thing that he had done until he learned that there was hue and cry for Lot Snow, who had disappeared and could not be found. Then he pondered over the past, and judged that since Snow had not revived and reached succour, he must be dead. His indifference was extreme. He had not meant to kill the man, but was glad that he lived no longer. Lot Snow had used him unjustly; there were many cruel deeds chronicled against him, and since the world must be the better for Snow's departure from it, Redstone experienced no uneasiness in the fact. But he much desired to escape suspicion for the same reason that Timothy Snow desired to do so, and he was glad that no wild words fell from Drusilla's lips during the days that followed her arrival at Dury.

Thither he brought her, and summoned a doctor to tend her, and explained how she had wanted to end her life and had kept from food. Then she had changed her mind, so vowed John Redstone, and felt now desirous to live. That was questionably true, yet it could not

be said that Drusilla fought against the effort made to save her. Redstone's immense vitality seemed to dominate her at this pass. By a sort of telepathic influence his spirit exercised authority over hers. In her profound weakness and inanition she obeyed him, for lack of strength to disobey, and, as time passed and she grew stronger, the bitterness of recollection stood between her and any further desire for death. She remembered the awful physical suffering, and felt unequal to facing it again. She became gradually content to be alive. The past sank to a nightmare remembered only as a dim and distant horror; she began to grow ashamed of the thing that she had tried to do. Very carefully she was nursed back to life by John Redstone and his married sister, Mercy French. This woman, who came to dwell at Dury until Drusilla was strong enough to do without her, made a good nurse under the doctor's direction.

Redstone proved very cunning on Drusilla's behalf and his own. Only the medical man knew the truth, and he did not tell it again. The story uttered abroad suggested that Drusilla had been at Dury longer than was the case, and it made as little as possible of her severe physical illness and narrow escape from death. Thus her name became associated with that of Redstone, and her conduct was attributed to a change of mind. She had thrown over Snow, and found in another man that which he lacked. She had suffered for a while and then gone to the other man: that sufficed to explain the mystery. Indeed few troubled their heads about her, for a matter far more exciting filled local mouths. Lot Snow had vanished, his nephew was gone out of England, and his sister, Sibella, had collapsed under the shock of his disappearance and doubtful fate.

John Redstone, then, desiring before all things to win Drusilla, seized every chance that could help him do so. He made no love, but he laboured for her without ceasing, exhausted his ingenuity during her slow return to health, and spent all time possible either with her or in seeking things to add to her content. Then a cloud fell on his increasing hopes, for, while Drusilla in her weakness was

glad to have him beside her and had unconsciously flattered his sanguine spirit with respect to the future, there came at last a shadow in her eyes when she regarded him, and a sudden silence upon her lips and a shrinking and shuddering of her limbs before the thoughts he awakened. He divined quickly enough what this must mean, and perceived that memory was sifting the past for her and lifting curtains, one by one, from the varied scenes of her starvation. She was come to the climax of memory, and, while her heart might be soft for her saviour, she could not choose but live again through those grim moments in the twilight. She saw Snow fall and heard his cry. She remembered what followed; she thirsted to know the truth, yet dared not ask to know it. Then, for the first time, John Redstone began to regret the thing that he had done. He hoped and believed that presently Drusilla would give the life he had saved into his keeping; but now he began to doubt whether the life that he had destroyed might after all prevent her. He was fearful and impatient by turns: fearful that such an accident might separate them, and impatient that it should do so. To regard the destruction of Lot Snow as a sin appeared to him the highest unreason. A crime it might be proved, but not a sin in his opinion. He longed for increased strength and control to return to Drusilla, that he might talk the matter out and explain to her how the thing he had done was good in itself, and that, good or evil, no blame attached to him, since the dead man had goaded him into passion and made him for the moment irresponsible. But that even her eyes should fear him meanwhile troubled John a great deal.

He spoke in private to Drusilla on a day when she was strong enough to listen. A stranger, aware of the facts, had thought the man inconceivably cynical, but in reality such an attitude was foreign to his character. Drusilla had been kind to him of late, and, realising something of his toil and expenditures on her behalf, to-day expressed her gratitude in generous terms.

She had thought much upon the tragedy, and, from horror, her mind had grown more calm. It appeared to

her a strange Nemesis that Redstone's hand had destroyed the man responsible for her own deep sufferings. Then the question arose whether Lot Snow was indeed dead, and she hesitated no more but asked John concerning that matter, and explained at the same time that she was not his judge.

"Tell me about it. I can hear it now," she said, while he sat beside her on a summer day in the little garden of Dury. "'Twas a terrible strange thing, and means more to me than any will ever know now—the death of that man. And have none ever thought 'twas you, John?"

He was very glad she had come to this event at last.

"Why should they? Sometimes I doubt if 'twas me myself! The old devil had got me properly dancing with rage, and he laughed to see me dance. He was torturing me and lashing me, but he forgot I wasn't on a chain, like a baited bull. And he didn't remember I had my whip in my hand. And so he got his quick passage. And though I didn't mean to, I'm glad—damned glad—I did it; and I'm gladder still that nobody's found it out. Only you know—only you in the whole world, and only you ever will. He wouldn't take my money, and he was firm set to ruin me, and when I thought of all my past patience and humbleness with him, I got mad and let fly and dropped him."

Again she saw the great body of Lot Snow in the gloaming. It reminded her of a slaughtered pig, and often haunted her dreams.

"He is dead, then?" she asked.

"Dead as a herring, though only I could swear to it. 'Tis a terrible queer thing that keeper Kingdon or another haven't found the man. I should have thought afore now they'd have nosed him out. No carrion will choke a crow, they say, so I daresay some fine birds will eat him; and there's been gay doings there among the beasts, too, I reckon! You could glut and come again to that mountain o' meat. They caught his pony miles away up 'pon Trendlebere Down two days after, though Lord knows how it had got there from the mine without being stopped, And that's all there is known. Of course they'll find him when the pheasant shooting begins, if not sooner. The

mazing thing is that he should have been in the wood unfound so long."

"'Tis an awful c'team to me looking back."

"'Tis a dream to me, too, but not awful. I still feel my riding-whip tingling down the handle, and I like to feel it. 'Twas doing the world a proper good turn, and I'm glad about it; and if the devil's flown away with his bones, so much the better for me. And his money, they say, will go to his nephew and his old sister, though it looks as if she wouldn't need it, for she's fallen terrible ill of the shock."

Drusilla marvelled at his indifference; yet in a week she began to share it. Looking back, long afterward, she felt amazed that she could regard the death of a man so lightly, but a light thing it seemed to her then before her own sufferings. And the dead had caused those sufferings.

She was still very sick, and the storms through which she had struggled left her feeble in purpose and uncertain in grasp; but imagination broke control at this juncture and concerned itself with Redstone and his deed. She built a false picture of the situation, and would gladly have communicated her thoughts to a sympathetic listener, but none could ever be allowed to know the truth. Presently she suffered for Redstone more deeply than he was ever like to suffer for himself. She imagined the remorse that he would never feel, and pictured the horrors of the confession that he would never make. Her nature began to turn to him and exalt him. From these thoughts, which she imparted to him, he laughed her away. He regarded his act with amazing unconcern, and so well knew himself, his outlook on life and conduct, as to declare that he would never wake the gloomier nor sleep the worse for the thing that he had done.

There was an aspect of the matter, however, that his grandfather now brought to his attention, and the situation, resulting from Lot Snow's death, made John far graver than thought of the death itself had power to do. He and old Jacob conversed on the subject, and John's sanguine spirit was clouded in some degree until he recollected that his grandfather spoke without full knowledge, and was therefore the less to be regarded. It seemed that the master of

Dury had exchanged one tyrant for another ; because there was a rumour that Lot Snow had left no will, and that, if indeed he was dead, Timothy would presently inherit his possessions.

"Supposing, then," said old Jacob, "that what you want to happen does happen, and in course of time this poor, lonely wreck of a girl will marry you, what price Timothy Snow when he comes home to all these great treasures? It looks to me, Johnny, like this: 'twill be a bit of a toss up 'twixt the farm and the maiden. If she changes her mind again about him now and will wed him after all, then, when he hears tell how you befriended her when she was ill, he'll be only too glad to give you all you want and more, to reward you ; but if he comes home to find as you've got her and he's out of the hunt once for all, then, if there's anything of Lot Snow in him, you mark me, he'll be just so swift to lay hands on Dury as ever his uncle meant to be. That's only human nature."

"He's not like Lot Snow," answered John. "He's built on a very different pattern, and be the justest, honestest man I ever met with. Terrible high opinions he hath. But the luck's against him in this. Lucky in life, unlucky in love ; and he's got the luck in life, and mayhap the luck in love after all be mine. What's Dury to me against her?"

"But 'tis just a question whether you did ought to make love to her," said the old man. "I don't speak for myself, because I'm not the sort that would suffer much if I was drove out of here ; but I speak for you, and I say that 'tis doubtful whether she——"

He stopped because sorrow came into the other's face.

"God knows I ban't a preacher. But there 'tis."

"She can't go back to him now, surely—not if she would. And, of course, she wouldn't—a proud woman like her. She chucked him once and for all. I'm only a common man, and I ban't going to flout my chance of luck no more. I want her, and I've saved her life, and there's a lot of good reasons why she should come into my keeping. She's free, and she knows that Snow be free. And presently he'll come home a rich

man. There's nothing hid from her, and, of course, there's no reason why she should take me if she don't want to."

His grandfather nodded doubtfully.

"I'd dearly like to see it. You and me be all alone in the world, and 'twould be a very fine thing to feel the Redstone race was going on steady afore I dropped."

"Why for not? She knows me well enough. I'm not the sort to take an unsporting advantage; but no more am I the sort to lose a chance. T'other chap half hated her when she chucked him, and hate can't die in a minute, even when it finds itself mistook. Life's life, not just messing about waiting for other people to do things. I be going to do things myself. I'd make a proper husband for her, and I'm going to get Drusilla to see it if I know how. I had enough pain to bear when she wouldn't take me before, after I thought she was going to, and I won't lose her again—not if my wit or work can rise to winning her."

"So long as you'm sporting, Johnny——"

"Trust me for that, grandfather."

"Of course," continued Jacob, "the chap may not be dead. He must have rode off somewhere after he left you. He was ever a dark and mysterious old blid, and he may be in hiding, or he may have gone after Timothy to hale him back, or some such deed. But for my part I'm pretty sure he's met with a fatal mishap, and be gone from the ranks of living men."

"No doubt you'm right, my old dear: he's met with a fatal mishap—be sure of it. A proper splutter he'll make on the Dowl's grid-iron! And as for us, Drusilla or no Drusilla, Timothy Snow's not like to turn us away, nor would his sister either. Drusilla had chucked the man once for all, for her own reasons, which were doubtless good enough; and he'd swallowed it as best he could, and gone cut of the country. Like enough he won't come back. Why should he?"

CHAPTER XI

It was Audrey Leaman who indirectly found the dust of the dead. She escaped, indeed, the horror of actual discovery, but her act led another to it.

There fell a day when her friends all failed her, and she went out to pick blackberries alone. Life with her was eventful, and she moved, as ever, on the borders of romance; but none as yet had won her, or could claim to be higher than another in her esteem. All men interested her, and their protestations pleased her, and their company rejoiced her. To pick blackberries alone depressed her, yet it happened that not a man or even a boy or girl was available for company. Only her great hound accompanied her. She began listlessly on the heather slopes above **Yarner**, then, convinced that there would be more and better fruit within the clearings of the woods, entered them, sat down by the old granite tram line, whence Timothy Snow had departed for the last time from the forest, and retraced the position with respect to him. Now that he was gone for good she declared to herself that she would have married him, and that she liked him better than any man of all the many men she knew. However, for the present he had passed out of her life and might never return into it. On the other hand, when he sent home his own destination, and when definite news of his uncle's disappearance and aunt's ill health should reach him, it was probable that he might return. Audrey hoped that he would do so.

The theory of Lot's death established by the police was now accepted. All men judged that he had been thrown from his pony into some deep pit or gully on

the high moor about the regions of Hey Tor or Trendlebere Down. A search was continued daily, but had not as yet revealed his body or furnished any clue. Only one man associated Timothy with the mystery, but he at present held his peace. Yet it was to him that the news of Audrey's discovery first came, and he acted upon it.

She sat now, some time after noon, and looked down upon the wide woods beneath her. Pheasants were calling close at hand, and presently, with a mighty hubbub, a cock got up and rattled off. His splendour flashed past within ten yards of Audrey and made her jump. Yarner sank beneath, like a mighty cup of jade set in amethyst, for the heather slopes towered round the forest to north, south, and west, and the great wood sank gradually below them by plane upon plane of trees to a dark, deep centre, where shadowy glens broke the light of the foliage and a river ran. The water murmured up from the bottom, and a breeze set a hard glitter upon the birches, where they wound, a ragged silver ribbon, through the duller verdure of the woods. As yet no faintest flame signal of autumn had touched the beeches, those first forest heralds of the great change, but the heather was beginning to fade to a pale brown preceding the sere, and its bells already uttered a crisp stridulation when brushed by the wind.

Beneath the hill, rising above a dense jungle of birch and oak, ascended the chimney of the ruined mine. Its summit was bright with a green chaplet of fern; and above it there hovered a great hawk. He settled presently and crowned the ruin with the symbol of the sun.

Audrey yawned, took out a love-letter from her pocket, and read how young Champernowne, then a lad of nineteen, was prepared to run away with her, marry her at a registrar's, and brave the anger of his father. His grandfather, he assured her, would not mind in the least.

He implored her to meet him on the following day at the cottage where Drusilla and her aunt had lived. It was empty now and offered a safe tryst. They would

marry and go to France for a while until his father's anger was dulled. She smiled at this proposal, but felt unattracted by it. Eustace Champernowne—a youth with a poetic temperament and high ideals of woman—had taught her a great many things and was wildly in love with her; but she cared little for him, though the unwisdom he proposed offered a mild temptation to her. Her special friend at this moment happened to be a postman. He was unhappily married to a woman ten years older than himself, and his chains had, of late, galled him raw. He confessed his troubles to Audrey, and basked in the warmth of her pity. This man gladly would have deserted his wife for her.

Audrey spoke to her Great Dane, 'Battle,' who sat beside her with his tongue out and his sulky eyes blinking up at the sun.

"What would happen if I went off with Tom Blake? Would they stop him being postman? I expect they would. They wouldn't trust people's letters to a man that chucked his wife. All the same, he's about as interesting and fearless a chap as ever I met. He'd get tired of me, no doubt. But we'd have a good time first. Why don't I *want* to marry somebody? 'Tis a beastly disgraceful thing, I suppose, that I don't. 'Tis the instinct in me. I'd make a proper lover, but a terrible poor wife. I've seen men I should like to love me; but I've never seen the man I should like to have children by. My mother says that's the test: and if you don't feel as if you'd like to have a man for father to a child, then you don't love him. But I—— No, never. No childer for me! I'd sooner look after any other young things than them."

She analysed her feelings without sentiment, and smiled at her own heart. She pictured her ideal and found it a composite.

"I'd have Fred Moyle's moustache and Tom Blake's eyes and Master Eustace's hands and grand way of love-making. Lord! I might be a princess to see him bow afore me! And I'd have Johnny Redstone's don't-care-a-damn fashion of looking at life, and Tim Snow's cold,

scornful cleverness. But you like Redstone best, don't you, my Battle boy? Redstone's eyes be very like yours, for that matter, and he's so plucky as you, but not so patient. And when all's said, if I got the best all-round chap in the world, I'd be tired to death of him after a bit. And a change-loving sort of girl like me oughtn't to marry anybody. And when I do, 'tis any odds 'twill be for convenience and freedom—not for love. Marry for anything—anything but that! If I ever love a man right down mad-like, I swear I'll love him too well to marry him and ruin his life sooner or later."

She stretched herself, yawned again, and rubbed her cheek against her hound's muzzle.

"A woman like me ought to wed a fool," she said, "then I should please him all the time and never worry him; and he wouldn't worry me. All the men I've ever met with be jealous at bottom, so far as I can see—all except Redstone; and he hadn't no call to be, because he never cared a button about me, though I took a bit of trouble to make him. And now, seemingly, he's got the girl he wanted—though a little bird says she did try to starve herself to death for love of somebody else. Fancy doing that! As if any one living man was worth dying for, when there are so many!"

Audrey fell to thinking upon Drusilla, and to wondering if she would marry Redstone. The story went that Drusilla had gone to Dury so ill that her life was threatened. Redstone had claimed the authority of an old friend, and kept her in his house and saved her life.

"If she takes the red man, my old Battle, then how will it be? They all say Lot Snow must be dead, so no doubt he is. And presently Tim will have all that he was meant to have, without the trouble of marrying me—the jam without the powder. And I shall never marry at all, very like; and more won't he if Drusilla's gone. So his land and mine will never join, and I'll be a farmer on my own when father and mother go—unless father cuts me off with a shilling for some love caper or other before the time comes."

For a moment she felt contempt at herself for this futile eroticism.

"Life's interesting and flat by turns," she said to the hound presently. "'Tis a thousand pities I can't do nothing but run after the men and make 'em dance after me. There ought to be something else worth doing. Picking blackberries! A silly fool I am — for all Eustace Champernowne swears I'm so clever. What a lark if I let him take me, and comed to be mistress of Yarner some day!"

She cleaned her dog's eyes, and rubbed her hand on his coat.

"I am clever, all the same—clever enough to read the men's looks. You can larn a lot about 'em from outside; and you can see into 'em, too. They be like the highway robbers; they don't say 'Your money or your life!' But their eyes say, 'Your body or your life!' while their lips twaddle about your beautiful soul. Much they care for souls, before they've got too old for anything more interesting! Sometimes I think 'twould be a fine thing to keep 'em hungry for ever—and leave 'em hungry, and die a maid. Only—only—they'd never believe it, and I'd get no credit. They don't believe it now—some of 'em. Another thing: I shall be old and withered in ten years' time."

She became depressed.

"If you bore yourself, 'tis a sure sign you're a fool, and I do bore myself something shocking, so I am a fool after all. Come on, Battle, my own darling; I'll pick blackberries, and be a fool, and marry another, and breed a pack more! You'll carry my little ones on your back yet, if you live a few year longer. Then you'll repent as much as I shall."

She rose, sank into the woods, passed a grove of birches, and found herself presently beside the ruins of the mine. Briars wound thickly about it, and blackberries grew ripe on every side. She plucked and then, dragging aside a bramble to reach fruiting canes beyond, there fell a large, black object from among the thorns that had held it, and she saw something very familiar to all residents of Ilsington.

It was Lot Snow's great hat — a soft 'wide-awake' with a very large brim.

Audrey became frightened, and looked no further; but she picked up the hat and hurried away with it. She made

haste to get out of sight of the mine; then she sat down and considered what next she should do.

It seemed certain that Mr Snow must have come to harm here in the woods. She decided quickly that she would tell Mr Moyle of her discovery. A reward of twenty-five pounds had been offered for news of Lot Snow, and Audrey felt pleased that Frederick should have it. Now she hid the hat in her basket, returned home and told none of her discovery, lest they should anticipate the policeman; but presently she went to see Mr Moyle, walked with him after dark, and handed the hat to him.

He was much excited, and made her swear to secrecy for the present. But carefully he hid from her the things in his mind. He had from the first entertained a private theory of Mr Snow's disappearance. He believed that if accidental death had overtaken the old man, his corpse must long ago have yielded to the search for it. But as yet no sign had appeared, and Moyle suspected, therefore, that he must have been hidden by those responsible for his death. He had already made private search in many places, and now, by the light of this clue, redoubled his secret exertions—with the result that he found the hidden body.

CHAPTER XII

DRUSILLA walked on the land with Jacob Redstone. They were alone, for John had ridden off at an early hour from Dury about private business. Indeed, he made a mystery of it, and would tell them nothing of his destination.

"I shall be in sight of Yarner at any rate, and that's all you shall hear till I come back along," he declared.

And this saying of his had wakened a responsive echo in Drusilla's mind and set her brooding. Her heart had gone out to John's aged grandfather, and she found that she could say many things to him not possible to speak to the younger man. And now she uttered intimate thoughts to Jacob, and he listened with sympathy and understanding, and spoke to her of vital matters also.

They stood where Dart skirted the farm fields and lifted her melodious voice to the morning.

"I'm glad John is off for a bit," she said, "for I want a tell with you, Mr Redstone. I'm grown very restless of late, and feel a calling to be away and to work. There's nothing hid between us, for God knows you've been tender as a woman to me, and I think I've got to thank you as much as John. He saved my life, but you've done the rest and made me want to live."

"And him, too. Don't say 'tis only me. You couldn't do no rash act again, Drusilla, not now you know there's such a lot of people in the world want for you to go on living. Besides, the wickedness. I ban't a preacher myself, being the faultiest man I ever met save two; but to go out of it—oh no, to kill yourself—that's all wrong. 'Tis to go to heaven afore you get your invitation, you see—so bad as turning up at a party where you wasn't axed. But that's

over and done with, and none the wiser but me and John, and you be going to live a long, useful life and see your children's children, I hope—as I have. And, come you take living in a large, easy spirit, and never cry over what can't be mended, but put your heart and soul into what can, then you'll get your fill of life and find 'tis better to have lived than not—as I do."

"You're such a laughter-lover, and can see the bright side of things in a way beyond the power of most."

"I had to do it. I had to ferret and forage for the bright side for years and years. It didn't seek me—no, nor yet thrust itself upon me. It took a terrible lot of finding—real hard work, you might say. But it growed to be a habit to look for it, and the more determined you be to seek it, the more easy it comes to find. There was a tramp taught me a lot in that way. A lazy dog, and dead these years and years now. Died laughing, you might say—by the roadside out Merripit Hill. Laughed at work, laughed at forty shilling or a month, laughed at the Justices of the Peace, laughed at life, and, when it came, laughed at death. I sometimes think, when I go through Postbridge churchyard, that I hear him laughing yet in his nameless grave. We've laughed together scores o' dozens of times—him and me. And you'll larn to laugh a little at last."

"You and your grandson and your granddaughter have been amazing good. And now I'm going to pay you back by going into the world again to be useful. I'm well and strong and hearty, and hungering for work. Why—I never guessed how lazy I'd been all my life till I talked along with Mercy French and heard what she'd done from her youth up."

"Work's all right. I'd never stand between any young thing and work, I'm sure. 'Tis very good food and very good physic both; but there's a time, when you come to my age, that your work's your play. Because I'm too far gone in the joints and back muscles now to stand to work like a man, so I come to it just for delight and amusement. I love to toddle about behind the hosses still, or pretend I'm digging the taters or what not. And only too sorry I feel when the flesh nips me and says, 'Steady,

old bones! you can't do that sort of thing no more, else you'll crack and fall, and have to go out on the rubbish heap with the other broken cloam!' " He chuckled at the image.

"You're a wonder. Never did an old man do so much."

"Don't you praise me. I can't stand praise. No, I can't stand praise no more than some horses can carry corn. It gets in my head like liquor. You praise John—that's the way to please me. He *is* a bit of a wonder, he is! There never was a better, in my opinion."

The simple old man began to sing the virtues of his grandson, and Drusilla did the like. But there was a restraint about her and a restless attitude of mind that soon silenced Jacob.

"Talk about yourself," he said presently. "Us don't hear enough about your thoughts and purposes. We've spoke sufficient about Johnny. Now tell an old man, as loves you very well, how 'tis with you, and what you be planning in your head for the future. And then I'll talk to you, because you must know that us Redstones be going to have a hand in your future whatever 'tis; and you needn't think to cold-shoulder us if you leave Dury, because we won't suffer it."

"I'll pray for your good every time I go on my knees, Mr Redstone—for you and John and Mercy and her children, too. I'm grateful, God knows that. You've nursed me back into life and made me content to live, and who else would have done more, or half as much? But now, as I said, I'm strong and hearty, and life's calling. There's my sticks, what poor Aunt Widger left me, and twenty pounds a year. Quite well-to-do, you see. But I must empty the cottage at Yarner and sell the things, for they be useless to me; and then I shall go into the world and take a place. I thought to go in a hospital, if Sir Percy Champernowne could help me and tell me how 'tis to be done."

"You! A wild bird like you shut up in bricks and mortar with sick folk! 'Tis a fine, useful idea, I grant, but not for you. You'm too much of a wood girl. You'd pine

and droop and go out altogether if you was took away from the open country and the forests. You don't like it up here, I know—too bleak and savage for 'e; but you'm trained up to live in a wood and——”

’Tis true,” she interrupted. “How you understand! You find things out that I’d never have the courage to speak, because they sound so silly. But ’tis strangely true—stupidly true, you might say. I’m shamed of myself, but oh! what it means to me—Yarner! My mind’s turning to it—misery and agony and all. Yarner was my life, you see. Everything—everything—the good and evil and happiness and suffering and everything in my whole short days was crammed into Yarner. And now it’s all fallen away—and the good and evil both—and I feel like a naked thing torn out of its shell. I long to get back and move in the woods, and hide in the woods. You’d never think it after what has happened. I can’t believe it myself, but it is true. I felt first that I’d never bear to look on the place again—and that was natural, surely, after what it meant to me—all my early happy days, and father dying, and then—love and loss and the horror——”

She stopped, for Jacob Redstone knew nothing of how Lot Snow had perished.

“Human nature’s that full of surprises,” he answered, “you can’t speak a positive word about your own future thoughts, much less about another body’s. I’d have reckoned, now, as you’d never have no more use for Yarner. My boy felt to hate every tree in the wood when you—but maybe that’s different now, I hope?”

She did not answer at this sudden change of topic, and Jacob, believing that this was the happiest moment for the attack, began to talk very earnestly of his grandson.

“A cruel, ticklish subject for an outsider; but I don’t feel to be that ezacally—not now. There’s nought like illness for getting to know people. They’ve got their armour off then, and some be at their best when they be sick, and some, I’m sure, be hateful. But you was brave and patient and long-suffering.”

“Well I might be, considering how I came to be ill.”

“Drusilla,” he said very earnestly, “let me put in a good

word for John. You know how 'tis with him. He's burning away, you might say, for love of you ; but there's a fear in him that it wouldn't be sporting to say any word on that score so long as you bide under his roof. O Drusilla, why for don't you bide altogether, and find your work here, instead of along with strangers? What stands against it? You know the pattern of the man, and you know the pattern runs through. He's fiery, and he's fierce, and he's a terrible stickler for justice and all that. He's not one of they bread-and-butter sort of men who always do right, because 'tis too much trouble to do wrong. He's a man with good and evil mixed up in him—like us all. But he do love you something tremendous, and if you'd only seen him when you had to say 'no' long ways ago—if you had only marked how it struck to the very roots of him and cast him to the earth and darkened all his days—if you'd noted one half of his grief and pain, I'm very sure you'd have felt it was a very real love he had for you."

"I never doubted that."

"And well you know that 'tis just the same as ever it was."

"Well I do know it. He found me dying. Some men would have left me to die—there are reasons why it would have been far wiser of him, I dare say."

She stopped and reflected. Had she died, not one soul in the world would know the thing that John had done. She imagined that some men, faced with an alternative of preserving a witness to their crime, or suffering that witness—already moribund—to perish, would have taken no step to save her. But certainly the murderer of Lot Snow had felt no temptation in that dilemma. He loved her with all his soul ; and now, before Jacob's plea, she asked herself what she felt to him.

Life, as she returned into it, seemed more difficult than before. Its issues were enormously complicated. She meant to live, but her heart sank before the problems now crying for solution. Her desire was to evade all matter that needed thought, to return to the theatre of the past and see whether the old scenes would content as of yore, and show the way to peace. It seemed incredible

that they could; yet her instinct implied that they might do so, and her spirit clamoured for them. She little liked the Moor, and such woods as she had roamed in by the lower gorges of Dart served only to remind her of Yarner. But they could not take its place.

Towards John Redstone her attitude was involved and difficult to unravel. Until now she had avoided the problem, feeling too weak to face it; but at last it cried to be approached. Gratitude and common-sense demanded a solution, and sentiment almost inclined her towards one that might rejoice him. Then the altered situation with respect to Timothy dreadfully tempted her to wait and see what he might do. She had expected for some weeks to hear of him; and indeed she would have done so, but for the accident of Sibella Snow's illness. Now, therefore, hope faded with respect to the vanished Timothy, and Drusilla remembered that he had left her in anger. At first she had supposed that, with his uncle's death, it would prove possible to confess her course of action and let Timothy understand why she had denied him; but it already looked more difficult. She, at least, could not take the first step, and even had her old lover been at hand to hear, she doubted whether she would have told him the truth. But he was gone, and though he must have written before the present, he had not written to her, nor apparently sent her any message. There remained the possibility of telling the Redstones, but here sentiment and her own undecided emotions silenced her. She felt very tenderly to the man who had saved her life. She recognised the size of the obligation, for it was not merely the act of salvation that counted, though that, seen in the light of the murder, stood for something, but also all that had followed through the weeks of nursing and patient care poured out upon her. She had a ready imagination; she possessed the power to see herself from Redstone's standpoint, and was thus able to appreciate his attitude. It spoke of a love that was worth possessing; it indicated distinction of mind and a sunny spirit that could find pure joy in the welfare of another. He had made no explicit love, but it was beyond his power to

hide the passion in him ; it was beyond his power to keep away from her, or to exhaust his ingenuity in lightening the wearisome weeks of convalescence. She marvelled sometimes that the blood on his hands did not stain her mind when she thought upon him ; but his own attitude to the death of Snow already influenced hers. He made no direct attempt to do so, and indeed very seldom mentioned the subject, though the mystery that enshrouded it from his point of view often filled his thoughts ; but his lack of penitence, his escape from remorse unconsciously affected her.

On one of the rare occasions when he alluded to the tragedy, he spoke and affected her more than she appreciated at the time.

"'Tis only by crying out morning, noon, and night that we are miserable sinners, we get ourselves or other people to believe it," he said. "And I don't believe it, and I'm not going to pretend I do—even to you. The sole trouble that can come to me out of that job will be if they find out I did it. And the more time passes, the less I fear that it will be found out. His thread was spun, and my work was to cut it, and I did ; and I don't care no more than the wheel cares, that runs over a mouse in the dark. And you don't care at heart no more than I do. 'Tis one stinging wasp the less in the world, and the proof of the pudding lies in the eating, for who has dropped a tear, or sighed a sigh to know he's gone ? Not one soul—unless 'twas his sister. And she's only troubled, they say, because they can't find the man, and bury him along with his parents in the graveyard outside her bedroom window."

Thus, then, it stood when Jacob spoke with Drusilla, and made her believe that once again the necessity for definite action lay before her. To stop John before he renewed any active lovemaking would be simple, but as she emerged from her lethargy, gathered up the reins of her life, and perceived that many years might still have to be lived, she doubted whether or not to do so. Sentiment made her hesitate, and the more she examined her own feeling with respect to John, the less disposed was she to utter any irrevocable word. Her illness had played pranks

with time, and in some aspects of thought it seemed that years rather than weeks had sped since Timothy Snow went out of her life. Memory had suffered not a little under the physical storm. She found herself regarding the past and the poignant agonies of the past through a heavy veil represented by her grave illness; and that barrier created results equivalent to the passing of much time.

To tell John Redstone now why she had refused to marry Snow would certainly silence him for ever; but the desire to silence him was doubtfully alive. Timothy spoke not, and in some moods she resented the silence, while at times of saner thinking, she perceived that to resent it was unjust. For what difference had his uncle's death made to their separation? All that the man knew was that she had thrown him over without a reason, and, so far as she was aware, he could not associate that reason with Lot Snow.

"Does John really want me, Mr Redstone?" she asked of Jacob now. There had fallen a long silence between them, and he was glad that she did not speak at once, for silence argued doubt, and where doubt filled Drusilla's mind there was still hope for John.

"Want you! Be there any need to answer that question? Do a cat want game when she smelleth it? Do a farmer want the sunshine when his hay's down? He worships you most steadfast, Drusilla, and he would do anything in the power of his strength to get you to love him."

"Don't think I can't see the size of my debt. Who could help loving a man that has done for me what he has?"

"That's all right, and I'm sure you feel it, but that's no use. The love that springs from gratitude be a good staple, but 't isn't the grand thing that rises above all such trifles as service. Gratitude and pity, and such like, didn't ought to decide a woman to go over to a man lock, stock, and barrel for evermore."

"'Tis all that some can ever rise to feeling. Many a woman's gone to a man just from being flattered that he could love her. A humble sort of girl will marry the first

that asks, thankfully, because she's so terribly surprised that anybody can see anything in her, and feels the least she can do for such a man is to give him all she's got. Men be the choosers—not women. We—most of us—just wait and watch—like apples on a bough—for the hand to come to pluck. And few make more resistance than the apple. We be quite willing most times to love any male thing with all our might and main, if he gives us the chance."

"Don't you run away from the subject," said Mr Redstone, and strove to keep her to it. They talked on, and she promised to think about the matter and impart her further ideas to Jacob.

"There's always surprises where there's active intellects," he declared, "though little surprises me nowadays—not the most unlikely things don't—not even your saying you hanker after Yarner. Belike Yarner haven't done with you yet, any more than you've done with Yarner. Time will show, and meanwhile bear in mind all I've rattled to 'e—sense and nonsense both."

"I shan't forget," she promised, and even had she wished to do so, chance was destined to remind her of her own words and Jacob's before that day was done. John Redstone returned at evening time, and spoke long of the things that had befallen him.

"To Yarner I've been," he said, after supper was ended, "and the place is looking fine. First man I met was Saul Butt, and he told me why I'd been sent for. And they be making a new clearing in the northern wood. Then I go to Amos Kingdon's house, and there he is, if you please, waiting to go afore Sir Percy with me! What came next you'll guess. In a word, Sir Percy's very wishful for me to go back to Yarner. The chap they've had, since Snow cleared out, ban't no good. He gets ill and can't face a rainy night, and just now the pheasants be turning their hair grey, for never was such a lot knowed in Yarner afore. And, in a word, they want me back, if 'tis only for a time."

"Funny that Drusilla should have been telling about Yarner this very morning," said his grandfather.

"Hates the name of the place, no doubt."

"Not at all. She's like a cat—ban't you, my dear? 'Tis the place, not the people, that draws her."

"Good Lord! Would you go back, Drusilla?"

But she was too deeply buried in her own thoughts to hear him. Fate seemed to be willing her home to the woods.

"I've got a message for you, too," said John presently. "Sir Percy has a tenant for your old home, and he's wishing to see you and hear about your future. Your goods must be took out at Michaelmas, because Saul Butt, the woodman, and his wife and baby and sister be going to live there then. And if I go back 'twould be to the east lodge, Timothy's old house. But the future's all in a muddle for many reasons. I'm told as Miss Snow to Ilsington, Lot's old sister, will be a power in the land now. And she'll very like see right about Dury, and let us keep it after all. On the other hand, she may list to Timothy, and us can't say how he'll view it. He's honest enough, any way. But there 'tis—I don't know what to do."

"How was Yarner looking?" asked Drusilla.

"Proper. And to think you want to go back! Us'll talk about that come presently. You'll have to plan my future for me, I reckon. 'Tis the least you can do, come to think of it."

"So it is," she said, but with no smile. "Humans can be like gods to one another sometimes, and do miracles. You took my life in your hands, and kept me alive when I wanted to be dead. You willed me to go on living; and now suppose I was to will you away from Dury back to Yarner?"

"I'd go," he answered. "Your will's my law—but what about you?"

Jacob, perceiving the drift of the argument, rose from his seat by the fire, knocked out his pipe, and shuffled to bed; but the man and woman advanced their understanding very little after he had gone. Redstone would not push the matter then, for he saw that she was tired and had much to think about; while she, feeling indeed mind-weary, was glad to postpone the inevitable need for some decision as to her future until another day.

He spoke of Yarnier to please her.

"Autumn's touched the woods," he said. "Just enough to swear by—you know how 'tis. The white-thorn and rowans be going rosy-leaved, and the dogwood's near black, and the beech has a touch of yellow to it, and the fern be turning brown. And the leaves falling—not fast, but one here, one there: and sometimes a score at a time, when there comes a puff of wind."

"I know," she said. "I know—just floating gently down, sad-like. They'll rustle past my ear sometimes, and touch it with little fingers, and whisper as they go; and sometimes they'll whirl up in the air—one or two together, like the butterflies, and sometimes they fall in the rivers and float away out of Yarnier—never, never to come back to their home no more."

"But 'tis different with you," he answered. "You can go back so soon as ever you've a mind to."

CHAPTER XIII

FATE and chance conspired to delay the discovery of Lot Snow's corpse. Two men, indeed, knew where it lay, and each, for his own purposes, kept that knowledge a secret. Each, indeed, had been at pains to make the hiding-place inviolate. For fear, one had wrought; for hate, the other. That he might not be involved in this death, since life promised still to be a precious thing, Timothy Snow had concealed his uncle's body; and when Moyle, after close search over that lonely ground, discovered what he hungered to find, he linked Timothy thereto and rejoiced. But instead of proclaiming his triumph, he concealed it and hid the body still more thoroughly. There was no immediate haste in his judgment; he anticipated events, and was content that his enemy should come securely home again before he struck.

Thus, the actual murderer of Lot Snow, when he thought upon the matter, continued to marvel concerning the place of the dead man; and of the discoverers, one, fearing himself threatened, had concealed the corpse; and the second, for his own purposes had made the concealment perfect. Like a dog he buried bones, to dig them up when he needed them.

Frederick Moyle did not lack for intellect, but it was allied to no principle, and albeit a man who had enlisted his life on the side of the law, no more lawless spirit lived. In a higher sphere he would have used his powers to base ends, and suffered his natural tyrannous instincts to bear fruit under the snug protection offered by his business. So far as it was possible for a village policeman he did

so, and afforded a minor instance of the evil that must result where a foul being is thrust above his fellows and entrusted with authority. His field, however, was limited, and, but for the fascination exercised over him by Audrey Leaman, he had long since wearied of the country and sought a wider theatre for his gifts. Now events conspired to offer him nearly all that he could have wished for himself. At a stroke there had fallen into his hand, not only power over the man he hated, but also a means wherewith brilliantly to challenge the attention of those set over him, and make good his claim to promotion and higher employment. The delay gave him exquisite pleasure, and he fed and fattened on anticipation. Audrey Leaman alone was aware of his labours, and, for the present, he assured her that no success had crowned them. He made much of her discovery to please her, and declared that in his opinion it must lead to more important things. He explained that, in the intervals of his leisure, he was conducting secretly a search that must sooner or later meet with its full reward; and he begged her, if she cared for him, and desired his ultimate triumph, to keep profoundly silent concerning the affair. She believed all that he told her, and the matter remained in abeyance while Moyle decided how most effectively to strike. Assuming Snow's guilt, he judged that Timothy might absent himself for a considerable time; but he guessed that when all fear of detection wore away, he would come home again about his uncle's affairs. And then it was that Moyle designed to pretend sudden discovery of the crime. He had planned his line of assault, and it left no loophole, for Timothy had been heard in the open to quarrel with his uncle; he had been seen to follow him; he had asked Moyle which way Lot Snow went from the top of the hill; he had been guided in the right direction by the policeman. All this was common knowledge. It remained for Moyle to relate how he had woven his theory on these facts, how he had been led to the actual site of the murder by Audrey Leaman's discovery, how, after long search, he had found the concealed remains of the dead.

The matter continued to interest Ilington, and the legal

aspect of the situation arose one evening at 'The Coach and Horses,' when Willes Leaman, Moyle, Seth Campion, and others were drinking in the bar.

"One may tell about it now," said the master of Middlecot to Ned Blackaller. "Now the old man's dead—for dead I'm positive he must be—there's no great harm in me letting out that him and me was very much set on my girl taking his nephew. And when Timothy flouted sense, and threw up everything and took the bit in his teeth and bolted, though I never saw Lot Snow again after the quarrel, I'm very sure I know what was in the man's mind. We'd talked of it afore. He meant to cut off Tim with a shilling, and then set to work to find a better and a wiser sort of man to fill his place. And since he thought the world of my daughter, Audrey, 'tis very like he'd have axed her to help his choice."

"And his money would never have gone to his nephew—not if he'd had time to make a will," said Moyle. "That's very sure, and so in my mind I'm with you, and believe he's dead, for he'd have looked to that job before anything else."

"Dead, no doubt," admitted Blackaller, "and the rames¹ of him will appear to the next generation, if not to this. Such a hugeous mountain of flesh can't be hid for ever, unless he's falled into the bowels of the earth. And meanwhile how stands the law, Frederick? 'Tis said there's no will at all, and his next of kin be his sister, old Miss Sibella, and his nephew over the water. Do he stand now, or do she?"

"The law's very clear," answered Moyle, "and I took the trouble to find out all about it. You must know there's such a thing as real property, and then again there's such a thing as personal property; and real property be land and houses and such like, and personal property is movables, like money in all its shapes—such as cash and stock and shares—and furniture and clothes and all that. Do I make my meaning clear?"

"Nothing could be clearer," said the innkeeper.

"'Tis all as you say, Frederick," added Willes Leaman.

¹ *Rames*, skeleton.

"Well then, first there's the real property. If Lot Snow's dead, his brother's son, that is Timothy Snow, gets it. He's heir under the law, and entitled to every brick and blade of grass. But with the personal property 'tis slightly different and old Sibella comes in there. She don't get all, but she goes share and share with the dead man's nephew. He ban't sole next of kin, as they call it, and so as far as the cash and things be concerned, him and his aunt take halves. Lot Snow, you see, had not another near relative, so 'tis all very simple indeed; and no doubt, when Miss Snow dies, she'll hand everything to her nephew, unless she took her brother's view of him."

"He'll come home to administer his land and his houses," said Blackaller; "and, very like, him and his mother will dwell along with his aunt at the house by the lich-gate. They was always friendly."

"No, Ned, he won't handle the lands and houses—for why? The law steps in there again. If he done that, the law would say, 'Not so fast, my man. We don't know yet whether your uncle be dead or alive.'"

"Just so," declared Mr Leaman. "'Tis a matter of waiting and patience—unless the corpse appeareth beyond shadow of doubt."

"Seven years," continued Moyle. "For seven years nothing can be done. All must bide in the hands of the vanished man's lawyers, and all must go on just as if he was alive. The Court must grant the heir leave to presume death. That's the hang of it. But the law's a cautious creature, and you'll not find it jumping to any conclusion in a hurry. So seven years must pass, unless some skilful detective finds the dead man, or accident gives him up afore that time. Timothy and his aunt will handle nought till then."

"All the same, since Snow be the only creature with any claim or title to the land and houses, if he was to take possession of 'em, I don't see who could turn him out," said Blackaller.

"True," admitted the policeman. "I doubt in that case whether the law's strong enough to touch the man, and 'tis certain none else can; but, since old Sibella lived along

with Lot Snow, she's the right to go on living there for seven year, and she's the right to deny possession of the house to Timothy if she liked to do it."

"The last thing that will happen, sōuls," said Mr Camjion, who had followed the argument as closely as his deafness would permit. "She's calling out for him, and cruel wishful for the young man to come home and bide with her. No doubt he will—if 'tis only for a time."

"She's been pretty ill, and no wonder," asserted Willes Leaman. "My daughter has dropped in times out of count to cheer her up; and, since my Audrey was a very great favourite with Lot Snow, she can comfort the man's sister more than any other, I do believe. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if Miss Snow was to remember it presently under her will. She's a grateful creature, and, whether or no, can't live much longer. This come-along-of-it has shook her up a good bit, and doubtless shortened her life. The old can't stand shocks."

"Lord, Leaman! what a thousand pities it is that all you two men planned could not be carried through," said Ned Blackaller. "What could have fitted in more suent than that your girl and young Snow should have falled in love, and joined up Middlecot and all that land above the village?"

"I won't say I've gived up all hope," answered the farmer. "You see, a good bit have falled out in the past month or two. And come the young shaver returns, and finds what it tastes like to have money and property and a stake in the world, his silly views and opinions may change. There's nothing to whet land-hunger like land, or house-hunger like houses. You give a man an acre of earth, and he'll very soon cast about how he can add the next to it. He must seek to enlarge his borders presently, because 'tis a deep-rooted instinct of human nature to do; and so Timothy will look round and see his luck, and find that there's nought standing between him and my place but the prettiest woman in the land."

"Don't you seek that," cautioned Moyle. "Don't you seek to get that man for your girl. She's a million times too good for him, as well I know—but no doubt you'll

think I haven't forgiven him, so I'll say no more. I ban't against him now, but I'm all for the girl's happiness, and she'd never be happy along with such a square-toes as him. However, I've got no quarrel more with him. He met me up over the very day afore he sailed away from England, and told me he was going, and asked my pardon for all the past; and I gave it without a thought and told him which way I'd seen his uncle riding, for he was after him that evening."

"Pity he didn't find the man," mused Mr Campion. "Who knows, if Timothy had been led to the poor creature, but he might have saved his life?"

"He sought, but didn't find," answered Frederick Moyle. "He wrote to Miss Snow the same night, for she told me so, and in his letter he said that he had hunted after Mr Snow, with purpose to express regret for harsh words and dangerous, wicked threats; but that he had failed to see anything of him."

"Well, thankful she'll be to have her nephew back, and for her sake, if for no other, I hope he'll soon be here, for she's quite shattered," said the master of 'The Coach and Horses.'

"And 'twill be a very rare sight to see how that man—with all his high opinions and scorn of cash—will shape under his great fortune," declared Mr Campion.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE came a Sunday in late September when Drusilla spoke with John Redstone, and declared her intention of leaving Dury. They sat together by the river in the sunshine, and the hour was noon.

"You shall drive me to Ilsington next Wednesday," she said, "and I've writ to Mr Blackaller at the inn to ask his married sister to give me a room for a few nights at her house, as she did when my aunt died. Then I go to see Sir Percy at Yarner, because he's very mindful still of what father did for his son, and I make no doubt he'll help me to find a place. And—O John, how shall I ever be able to thank you for all you've done for me? 'Tis far beyond the power of words."

"But not deeds," he answered.

The man had waited for this conversation, and knew by her increasing restlessness that the time was near. He had decided with himself not to speak until she put a term to her stay at Dury; and now she was going. He felt not hopeful, and came to his proposal with some dread; but accident had improved the outlook in his judgment, and he explained to her now that his own future depended entirely upon hers.

"Not deeds, Drusilla. All the same, there's no call for you even to be grateful. All the owing is on our side—every bit of it. You'll never know what you've been to grandfather and me, or how cruel we shall miss you. 'I can't think of Dury without her no more,' he said to me when you was gone to bed last night. And I said—I said, 'Dury be damned,' I said. 'I can't think of myself without her no more.' And that's terrible

true, Drusilla. Give heed to me—there's a dear—and don't interrupt till I've said what's in my mind. Here we are—you and me—all alone in the world, you might say—and I can't for the life of me see why we shouldn't come together. You don't hate me—you like me—you even care for me, because you told grandfather so. And I—I love you more than ever I loved you. You've come to be to me just everything in life, and if it can't be—if there's that in me you couldn't home with—— But is there? You understand me so well, and you'd never have took the trouble to do that if you hadn't felt more than common interest. And I understand you—yes, I swear I do. I understand, for instance, why 'tis, and how 'tis, you feel a hankering after Yarner again, despite all the cruel things you've suffered there. I know how 'tis and why 'tis. You're a part of Yarner, you be so much a part as the great fir, that grows in the midst ringed round with birches, or the river running through, or the creatures born there. You was born there—'tis your natural home and food, and you're being starved on Dartmoor. D'you think I don't understand all that? And I care a lot for Yarner, just because you do; and I want for to see you planted back there, among all the things you know and that know you. I'll swear they miss your coming and going. And look here, Drusilla—I've very near done now—if you'll but say the word, and let me be your faithful partner and lover for evermore, we'll go back there together. And then, when Amos Kingdon drops out, as he will on a pension come a few years, I'll so work as they'll lift me to be head-keeper, and us'll have Kingdon's fine house—and there you are! Forget a thing here and there, Drusilla, and come to me. You know the sort I am—not so bad—only short-tempered and too fiery. And—— But I can't say no more. I've bottled it up till now for fear of hurrying you off; but now you'm fixed to go, you must hear me. 'Tis all spoke in a great master love I've got for you, and my love have sweetened my life, even though 'twas hopeless till now—but now—now—don't say 'no' again, my darling, wonderful girl! Come to your Johnny, and trust

him to work with all his might for you, and love with all his might for you till his dying day."

She expected this; but she came to the proposal still undecided. His petition moved her. The expression of his eyes touched her a little. A word of her real reason for refusing Timothy Snow would have settled the matter instantly; but she could not speak it, though she knew that it must be now or never. She had heard nothing from Timothy, though it was reported that Sibella Snow had heard from him. He had gone out of her life, and she could make no effort to bring him back again. A gulf of agony separated them, and distance had not made her heart grow fonder. To cross that gulf again must for ever be impossible now. And it seemed that he no more desired it than she did. Drusilla looked at Redstone, and answered wearily. She did not say 'yes,' but implied the possibility of saying it.

"There'll be many ghosts in Yarner now, and I shall fear them."

"Then you'll need somebody to keep 'em off."

"And don't you fear them, John?"

"I! Not I. I fear nothing alive, much less do I dread the dead. Ought I to? It ban't in me to do it, Drusilla. A dead man's no more than a dead tree. And who would fear that?"

She thought yet again upon Timothy Snow. He had faded much of late, and seemed shadowy by contrast with the man in the flesh by her side. Now Redstone spoke of the other.

"Perhaps this ban't a very clever moment to mention the man, but I've a feeling you mean him—Timothy Snow. He's no ghost. He's alive—gone—sent going by you. Be straight now, Drusilla. 'Tis all against my own interests to name his name at a pinch like this, for this moment be full of my future—my life hangs on it, you may say—hangs on you, and your 'yes' or 'no.' But when you say 'ghost,' 'tis only him you can have—where? Where, Drusilla? In your mind, or in your mind's eye, or in your heart? Be damned to me for a born fool to drag him up! I wish he

was a ghost. But he ban't. He's alive and kicking—kicking hard, for all I know, because you—— What am I saying? 'Tisn't decent—yet you understand. I'm playing with my chances—yet you understand. Is he hid in you or isn't he, Drusilla? Was it true you changed your mind about him? Was it true—or only a—— Fool, fool, fool that I be to ask such questions. . . .”

“I like you better for asking them. Maybe it shows you love me more than I thought—better than yourself, even.”

He looked at her, but did not speak.

“You're right to name him now,” she added. “You was always a good sportsman and hated them that were not.”

She felt a great temptation to tell him why she had left Timothy. But she could not, for she had determined to marry him.

“You loved him, I know that,” said the man. “I don't want to make any mistake. I don't want you to come to me for some fancied obligation, Drusilla. There's none—none in the world. I'd have done the like for any woman or man or dog. If I took a life, I saved a life; and your beautiful saved life can be balanced very well against his beastly lost one. The world's the richer both ways. But there's no need to go over that no more. You was killing yourself for some reason—slowly killing yourself. I don't know what 'twas, and I don't want to know. But be that reason dead? Can you swear that there's no thought nor grief great enough now to make you want to go again? If there is, can I come betwixt that grief and you, Drusilla? Don't take me if I can't. If I ban't strong enough to take sorrow off your shoulders, I'm not worthy of you. I want to be of mighty use—I must be everything or nothing. I can't have you, and be no more to you than a man about the place. I must be nearer than anything—nearer than Yarner, nearer than your own soul. I'm greedy as the grave. If I've got to go without, I'll go without; if I'm to have any, I must have all. Not a moderate build of man—you know that. God forgive me—crying

stinking fish again, and running myself down when I ought to be cracking myself up. . . ."

"No need to fear," she said. "I know your virtues, John. You've got more than you'd allow."

"You can think that! Thank the Lord, then! There's hope! But I'll say it once again, though it dashes all, and douts the last glimmer of light. I'll say it again, and 'tis this: I don't want you if you don't want me. I'd find out if you came to me for gratitude, and not for love, and then there'd be a mess and a peck of trouble very quick. I couldn't suffer that. It must be the real, living, red-hot thing, Drusilla, for nought less will satisfy a red-hot man like me. And that's all, excepting that I love you with every drop of blood in my veins, and I'd fight this world and heaven and hell for you, and do deeds above all that was ever done or heard of for you. Yes, I would, Drusilla. Loving you have made a finer chap of me—a far finer chap, I swear it—and if you was to love me back, I'd rise sky-high and live to make you proud of me. Who could do less than wonders, if they was wed to such a piece as you? O God—I'd credit God—yes, I'd do that if I could win you! For nought less than a fine God could plan such a thing as you for a man. Come to me! You believe in souls and all that. Then take my soul in exchange for your body, and belike you'll larn me to believe in it myself afore the end. Come to me, and let me live for 'e, Dru, darling!"

He put his arms round her neck, and dragged her close to him. She did not stay him, but looked steadily, searchingly into his face, and neither spoke nor smiled. Something in the man now prompted him to touch the darker side of himself again, and thrust hideous personal incidents upon his lovemaking.

"I'm not a murderer—so far as I can see," he said bluntly. "They've never found him—and maybe never will. You know, 'twasn't the cold-blooded, wakeful, watchful, secret thing that murder is."

He stopped, but she bade him speak on. Her sense of the seemly was outraged.

"For Mercy's sake don't stop there," she said. "Don't leave me with that horror in my ears before I speak to you!"

He laughed at that.

"You have spoken," he answered, "else my arms wouldn't be round you now, and suffered to stop there. You have spoken. You love me—I've killed a bad man in a rage, and yet you love me—and my life's afore me to do mighty things, and work goodness, and find high deeds to my hand. I'll go by your light, Drusilla—'tis clearer than the sun for me, and my foot won't slip no more, and I'll be patienter and gentler and——"

"Great promises!" she said.

"Made on your strength, not mine," he answered.

An emotion swept her. Her heart moved, and woke again as from a trance. She believed that circumstances had opened the door to love between her and this devout lover. She told herself that life had been powerless, until the recent past, to wake within her anything but esteem and affection. But now much had happened to bring them together. He had saved her life—was not that enough? She built on this. She felt that she was in the way to love him. His humility pleaded for him. She loved the humble. Timothy had never been humble but once—when he begged her to reconsider her refusal.

She realised that the man's arms were still round her neck, and his face near hers. Then she focussed her eyes upon him, and looked into their russet depths. Her expression apparently banished any doubt for he kissed her passionately, then let her go and flung himself face downward upon the sward by the river, where hidden they had sat.

For a long time he was silent, with his countenance concealed; then he felt her hand put out to him.

"Forgive me," he said, "but my brain was spinning. 'Tis almost too much for a mortal man. I was drowning in joy, like a chap might drown in the river. I was choked with it—could hardly breathe. To think—to think—and every bird in Yarner would be whistling, and every tree singing, and every flower budding, if they knowed as you

was coming back so soon! Aye, soon's the word—soon—soon soon, Drusilla!”

She held his hand while he spoke again.

“And say 'tis for love, Drusilla—nought else—nought else—not pity nor gratitude nor any other stūpid thing!”

She looked at his great square hand, and noticed how the nails were bitten down. She put her face to it.

“Would I have took you for anything less than love?” she asked. “How can I help loving you—things being with us as they are?”

There was a note almost querimonious in the question; but he did not notice that, and cried aloud his joy.

CHAPTER XV

SIBELLA SNOW had been thrown into very dire confusion at her brother's disappearance, and the strain and stress, acting upon a mind enfeebled by age, upset her. Mentally and physically she suffered, and it was not until several weeks had passed that her health mended, and the doctor ceased to visit her. During that period Sibella's clouded intelligence betrayed her. Her memory failed; certain actions very vital to another were not performed; certain promises were not kept.

Blame attached to none; only the falling out of things upset her balance, and by the time it was restored and she regained strength and composure to proceed with a life radically changed in its great particulars, time had sped with those involved, and it appeared no longer possible to fulfil former undertakings.

Not for some time, however, did the old woman perceive all that had happened since the vanishing of Lot Snow and her subsequent collapse. When partially restored to health her mind turned first to Timothy, and her desire was towards him. None else but the lawyers could assist her, and since the general conviction appeared to be that her brother was dead, she felt imperative need of her nephew's return. Possessions were nothing to her, and she purposed to make all over to Timothy at the earliest possible moment. Impatiently she had awaited news of him and his direction, but, when the man's first letter arrived, she was too ill to read it. The lawyers, however, did so, and communicated to him as swiftly as possible the disaster that had overtaken his family. His answer was delayed, and when it came, he expressed deep concern for Miss Snow, and

declared that he would return to support her if she desired it. In a private letter to his aunt he asked for information respecting Drusilla, and it was not until some weeks later, when well enough to take up the threads of her life, that the old woman read this letter and busied herself with Timothy's affairs. She did not realise at that time the significance of the delay, but it was soon forced upon her. She replied to her nephew with an entreaty that he would return to her at the earliest possible moment, and an assurance that Drusilla was safe. She knew what Ilsington knew, but no more, and informed Timothy that the girl had been very ill, had gone to friends at Dury Farm on Dartmoor, and had there been nursed back to health. Miss Snow promised to see her as soon as she conveniently could do so, and then undertook to write again.

Youth, with all its time before it, is ever in a hurry; while the old, though their tether's end may lie in sight, preserve a deliberation that makes the younger generation frantic. Sibella took her time, unaware of any necessity for haste. She learned that Drusilla was well again, and that her future plans continued uncertain.

At length an opportunity occurred for seeing the girl. The carrier travelled from Ilsington to Widecombe and Postbridge; and Miss Snow, now restored to health, and accustomed to the disaster of her brother's obliteration, determined to devote a day to Drusilla. She went to sound her as to her purposes, and learn, if possible, her attitude toward Timothy. Miss Snow was prepared to tell Drusilla that Lot had revealed her secret, and explained to Timothy, almost in the moment before his disappearance, why the keeper's sweetheart had refused him. Under the altered circumstances, further need for this great sacrifice did not exist, and Sibella rejoiced to think how she would be able to tell the heroine of the story that Timothy loved her more than ever, and would swiftly return home to claim her again.

She built up a pleasant picture of the girl's emotion on hearing the great news, and brooded peacefully while the cart of Thomas Turtle, the carrier, conveyed her to the Moor.

Her journey was undertaken on the day after John

Redstone's triumphant wooing, and the man himself met her before she reached the road to Dury. He was on horseback, and stopped the public vehicle before he recognised Miss Snow.

"Hold on, Tom Turtle! I've got a bit of news, and nought to carry it like a carrier!"

Mr Turtle drew up, and lit his pipe. Then John noted the passenger.

"Of all people! Miss Snow I see. I hope you be growed stronger, Miss? My folk was a good bit troubled to hear of all your worries."

Frankness personified sat on the man's red and happy face. It is a fact that at the moment he utterly forgot his own hand in Miss Snow's tribulation.

"I'm stronger, thank you, and very hopeful that my nephew, Timothy, will soon be back to look after things. 'Twas a terrible come-along-of-it, and threw me off my balance, and took ten years off my life, I'm sure. But I'm able to face it all now, and trust to Higher Hands to right the wrong. And, by the same token, how's Drusilla? I'm here to see her."

"And wish her joy, I hope. 'Twas about her I stopped Turtle's coach. Us be going to wed—truly and faithfully! I can't believe it yet—'tis one of they sudden, far-reaching things that leave a man full of joy, and he dreads shutting his eyes and falling asleep for fear of losing a single moment. But there 'tis: she've took me, because I had the blessed luck to save her life. And such love as her's never was afore, I'll swear. 'Tis to be this instant moment, you might say, and I'm now on my way to Widecombe to have the banns axed out next Sunday. And she's hungering after Yarner, where she was born and bred; and to Yarner I shall take her, because I go back myself now she's decided. Give me joy—both of you. And I shall be back afore you go, Miss, I hope."

Sibella could not conceal all that she felt at this sudden news, but she murmured some expression of pleasure. Her own course now looked difficult indeed. Her bewilderment increased, and her mind began to wander. Unconsciously Redstone solved the difficulty.

"And now you're my landlord, Miss; and I hope to God you'll find yourself able to meet me. Mr Lot couldn't see with my eyes. He never forgave my father for doing him a wrong. But—you—you—you don't harbour no revenges against the dead? You won't take Dury away? You'll let us bide our time, and make all good slowly? 'Tis more than ever to me now, because I may have raised up a son this time next year. Just think of that great thought! And 'twill be a terrible cruel thing if Dury is to slip away from my boy. Remember I sold all my sheep to save it."

She came to herself at this, and saw here an easy excuse for her visit.

"I'm not likely to be hard, nor my nephew neither. I pray he'll be home in a month or two, and I'll promise for him that he'll listen to reason, Mr Redstone. I was just over to say that and a few other things—and to tell Drusilla I was glad she'd grown strong again. You can trust Timothy to do right by the farm."

"Well I know it—even as the case stands. He's above revenges and beastly things like that. And you might tell him when you write how it is between Drusilla Whyddon and me. 'Tis a very tender subject for the winner to touch, and I don't know even now, and I shall never ask to know, why for she changed her mind about him, for he was a much finer and cleverer sort of man than me; but after saying 'no' to me and 'yes' to your nephew, I suppose it came up in her wonderful mind that something was wrong, and she very near died of it, without a doubt; for she's a tender creature—all nerves and feelers where her duty's concerned. Anyway, love and conscience and all the rest of it told her she had made a mistake—that's clear. And she had pluck enough, at cost of bitter pain to herself and him, to chuck him and stand his hard words afterwards. Then, somehow, she drifted back into my keeping, and at last, after she'd been at death's door, she saw how life went, and that I was the man. And but yesterday—but yesterday it was—she took me. And I'll thank you to let your nephew know very clear how it all stands; because I'd hate for any darkness and difficulty

between him and me when he comes back. There's Dury first, but that's nothing. There's my wife, as she will be by then, and I'd like for him to understand how it fell out—all fair and above board. I want him to know before everything that I didn't tempt her away from him, or anything like that. But she decided about him once for all before I came back into her life and won her. 'Tis only fair to her and Timothy to make that clear. She was contrite enough about changing her mind. But such things will happen, and men and women ban't strong enough to know their own minds for certain at all times."

"I can't stop listening to your chatter no more, Johnny," said Mr Turtle. "I must get on, or all Postbridge will wonder where I be stuck to."

He proceeded, and presently Miss Snow talked with Drusilla, perceived that she was content and listened to her plans.

"John wants to be married in a month, and get back to Yarner and take up his old work. They wish him to do it. And I'll be very glad to go back there, though I've suffered a great deal there—partly my own fault and partly another's. But it's over, Miss Snow, and I'm thankful enough to be alive. I did very wrong to try and get out of it. I can look back and see that. I've got a good man to love me, and I'll try and make him happy."

She spoke without enthusiasm, and still showed traces of her illness and privations. She neither mentioned Timothy Snow nor alluded to the disappearance of Lot. And Sibella followed her example. She felt now that time must pass and deep deliberations ensue before she dared mention Timothy. She spoke of Dury, promised that Redstone's anxieties on that score might be allayed, and was glad when the time came for her to depart and rejoin Mr Turtle on his homeward way.

Old Jacob walked to the high-road with her, and exhibited a very active joy at the trend of affairs.

"God's turned His Eye upon us, without a doubt," he said. "For here's Johnny lifted up unto heaven on earth, along of that dear creature loving him and ready to take him; and as if that wasn't enough, you come along, with

this brave news that he's to be allowed to win back Dury. A very honourable man, mind you. You'll lose nought by him if you have to live a hundred years. We'm both like that. 'Tis all figured out to a sixpence, and the time and everything."

"My nephew will see to it. But he's a just man, too. And he'll be very well pleased to mix a pinch of charity with his justice if I want it so."

"No doubt, no doubt. Lucky be they as have the chance to practise charity upon their fellows. 'Tis one of the great blessings of the rich, I'm sure, that 'tis in their reach every hour of the day. But there's a good few don't value it, so far as I can see. I'm sorry for the greedy rich, and sorry for the generous poor, too, because they be often very alive to the beauty of charity, and don't get the smallest chance to use it. 'Tis not to blame the greedy rich I speak, however. They'm born rich, and bred selfish, through no fault of their own. I think a lot upon these questions, for I've marked great changes, and I've laughed at 'em all. They'm so blind, these here rich folk; they can count up the figures in their money books, but can't count up the number of the poor and set 'em against the number of the rich, and subtract one from t'other. 'Tis a sum that the poor are doing cleverer every day, however; and they'll come to money sums and land sums next; and there'll be a very sharp question put against the arithmetic of the rich. They'll get terrible hot about it in the next generation, and there'll be a long rest for charity. Everybody will scorn the word. The meek be going to inherit the earth—and then they won't be meek no more. Not that you and me will live to see it, my old dear."

"Nothing hides the truth of life from people like money," said Miss Snow. "I don't like rich folk. They only try to please one another. 'Tis natural, no doubt. There's a gulf fixed between poor and rich, and, so long as there be poor and rich, 'twill never be crossed. The rich don't know they're born; but that's the first thing the poor find out."

"Doan't be too hard on the rich," said Jacob. "'Tis only one in a hundred of 'em properly enjoys his money.

They suffer from all sort of complaints we can laugh at—complaints of mind, I mean. I've seed a rich man just dance with passion and thwarted temper to know he was being scored off and done all round—and nobody to hit back. 'Twas his wife and children, and the shopkeepers, and the labourers and servants, and the Radical Government with their taxes, and in fact everybody on earth—all had their claws into his deep purse. Life was a bed of thorns for him, and he smelt thief day and night. A silly man, too—hadn't earned his riches, but hated to think anybody else should have a penny without earning it. Went through life properly groaning under his weight of cash, and died of a cancer; and even shortened his days at that, 'twas said, by fretting his gizzard green about how to dodge the Death Duties."

That night Sibella, from her chicket window above the churchyard, gazed upon the tombs, and sought from their silence to learn what she should do. She puzzled long, fell asleep there, and woke to find the moon had risen and run a silver band round many a slate and stone. An owl hooted from a cypress, then it flashed down, swept over the mounds, and caught a mouse on the grave of a young farmer's wife. She had been buried a year, and a white cross was just lifted to her. There ran a legend upon the plinth extolling the Christian virtues of the dead; yet all in Ilsington, save a stricken widower, knew that her virtues were not those precious to a Christian or a husband.

"Silence—silence," thought Sibella—" 'tis the only safe road to pick nowadays, for the world's got so noisy that silence is forgot and goes unmarked. I've practised it most all my life, and now—even if I would be talking—what should I say? 'Tis clear we was mistook about Drusilla refusing Timothy, and for my brother's memory I'm glad to think so. Surely he never choked the girl off Timothy after all, though he said as he did, because if it had been his work, she would not have denied her lover any more, now that Lot's arm don't block the way. Surely the first thing she'd have done, when she got strong

again, must have been to seek out Timothy, and tell him all about why for she had thrown him over. But she's took Johnny Redstone. Knowing that the case is altered, she's nevertheless took him, and there's nothing more to be said."

She convinced herself that in no case had any loophole of hope been left for her nephew with Drusilla, and resolved to write accordingly. She mourned for Timothy, but was thankful for herself that she could not blame her own delay as the cause of this crushing news. She resolved to acquaint her nephew with the facts as she understood them; explain that the reason of Drusilla's rejection was clearly not inspired by Lot Snow, and still remained a secret; break to him that Drusilla had joined Redstone, and intended immediately to wed and go back to Yarner. Only when she thought upon this item of news did Sibella flash into some indignation. She resented the girl's return to her old home, and marvelled at the hardness of a heart that could live in that theatre sacred to another man, whom she had loved and lifted up, only to cast down again at some secret whim, apparently too ugly to be revealed. She sighed in sympathy with Timothy, then considered whether her anger might be justified. Did she know enough to be angry? The mousing owl cried out again, and the graves glimmered. The moon was got west of south, and Sibella's home threw a black shadow into the churchyard and obscured the resting-places of the Snows. She looked at the place that Lot had long ago chosen for himself, and she hoped that she might yet live to see him peacefully laid there. The thought that she was rich and powerful returned to her. She had feared and fled from that idea, but it became more endurable now. She designed all for Timothy, but knew that houses and lands would not lessen his tribulation when her news should fall upon him.

CHAPTER XVI

DRUSILLA moved in a strange and unreal atmosphere of ideas during the brief weeks that separated her from marriage. She could not estimate her own feelings, and gave up trying to do so, but the underlying emotion was one of suspense. She felt not unhappy. She was alive to the worth of Redstone, and much in him chimed with herself. The lurid cloud that hung over him did not frighten her, since he appeared so profoundly indifferent to it. He could not be called callous or cynical. His attitude was genuine, and she shared it, so that now she felt no more discomfort before the incident of the past than a butcher's wife might feel when her husband comes red-handed home to breakfast. She thought, indeed, upon a possible sequel, but he never did. And then she found that in all honesty, without any deception thrown by gratitude or sentiment, she began to love the man. It was an emotion still differing from her worship of Timothy, as dawn differs from the light of the noonday sun; but it was a true dawn; the light shone clear and irradiated her spirit. Since she had to live, her instinct to minister to somebody or something would be gratified in the home of Redstone, and she felt eager to begin the new life, so that she might think more of others and less of herself.

There is a sort of strength exhibited by women that amazes men, and even Redstone, a stranger to sentiment, felt wonder to see the attitude of Drusilla when she stood in the thatched house at Yarner's eastern gate—the cottage amid the green laurels beside the stew pond, where Timothy and his mother had dwelt.

His instincts declared that he could not ask Drusilla to

live there. He had merely mentioned the proposed plan and left her to negative it. But she did not. A week before they were married she went with him to their future home, and planned it, and walked through the chambers without any outward sign of distress. He told himself that if he had been a woman, he could not have done this; but perhaps only a woman could. Redstone was none the less exceedingly glad, for Drusilla's self-control made the future simple and straightforward. He kept from all sentimental comment carefully, and fell in with every suggestion that she was pleased to make.

The trap that had brought them waited at the higher lodge, the girl's old home, and on the way thither, back through the woods, a storm broke upon them and they sought shelter beneath a giant spruce—the king of the forest, as Drusilla had always called it. Both had viewed the gaunt chimney of the mine on the hither hillside, but neither had spoken of it. The man, however, was quick to know her thought, and answered her unuttered words.

"We can't see the thing from our home," he said. "'Tis well out of sight round the shoulder of the fir wood."

She nodded, but did not answer.

The storm beat fiercely overhead. The rain ran down the beech trunks in little cataracts gathered from the expanse of the foliage. Like cups, every leaf of a myriad leaves gleaned its share, and added a few drops to the volume contributed by the branch. These tributaries met at the main stem, and carried each tree's proper tribute to the roots. Overhead the roar of the water falling on the forest was like thunder.

A man came running for shelter to the great spruce.

"'Tis Saul Butt," said Redstone. "Ah, Saul, well met! I was wishful to ax you to my wedding feast at Dury o' Monday week. A good few neighbours be coming, Mr Kingdon and his wife among the rest."

"I'll be there and welcome, and thank you very much, I'm sure," said Saul. "Campion told me a bit ago that his friend, your old grandfather, had axed him. And we all be very glad that you come back; and I hope that your young woman have forgiven me for taking her old

house. I heard she'd have liked to go back there after she's married."

"Not at all," declared John. "She's very pleased with the east lodge, ban't you, Drusilla?"

"I'm glad of it," said Butt. "You may have heard, the chap as dwelt there be coming home along. And he'll bide home altogether, 'tis thought, for, of course, there's a lot of man's work to be done for Miss Snow, now her brother be snatched away in this queer fashion; and as all the riches will belong to Timothy when she drops, if not sooner, he's coming back to look round for her, and clear everything up so far as the law allows. And the chances look as if he'd stop, at least so long as his old aunt lives."

"He will for sure," declared John; "she'll look to him to do so. There'll be a pack of business, and 'twill doubtless pay him again and again to stop."

The storm swept forward; the sky cleared, and Drusilla, with Redstone, went her way through the waning drip.

"How my stupid heart changes!" she said presently. "Now that you're coming back here, and leaving Dury just for me, and only for me, I begin to wonder if I shouldn't be happier after all in your farm. 'Twas a great sorrow to your grandfather, I believe, when you decided for Yarner. I'm such a selfish creature since I was ill."

"Don't you say that, and don't you fret for gaffer. He's all right. Never a week will pass but you or me will get a sight of him. We shall see what happens to Dury when Timothy Snow comes to tackle it. He's an upright and honourable creature, and I ban't feared that he'll do as his uncle did. Timothy keeps faith with his fellow-men, and I'm very willing and wishful to trust him, and be his friend—if he'll suffer it."

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

Now the hem of Demeter's garment was threadbare and its rags and tatters of glory marked her passing; while behind the gold, her heaven-blue veil fluttered in every thicket and tangled in every glen. The heaths and hanging woods, the glades and secret places by streamside had indued themselves with the tinctures of the hour. They pulsed in light of dawn and sunset, and each day heightened the splendour since the thinning forests atoned for their lost legions by the increasing brilliance of the leaves that still held the bough.

As in burgeoning and accession, so at this season of surrender, each tree of all the myriad trees revealed a proper personality, and, while yielding to the sere and keeping punctual count of autumn's toll, yet obeyed its individual nature and displayed its idiosyncrasy. The oaks conformed to rule each in her own way; the beeches passed at separate hours and with different manifestations; the birches likewise declared themselves; and as the shepherd separates his sheep, that to the unseeing eye are moulded on one pattern, or the huntsman segregates the nature of each hound, so a woodman perceives how widely unlike may be the kindred trees.

Now all were shedding their leaves and entering upon sleep, but the manner of yielding was diverse, for here the prodigal stood already stripped of gold; here her more chary sister gave sparingly at the demand of the wind; and here rose another, who had broken later into life at spring-time and still persisted, a tower of steadfast green, against the gaudy wood. Their doffing of raiment was like a city, that sinks upon repose to wake and rise

again; for the forest fitfully cast aside its robes, grown worn and mellow through the storm and fret of the year. Slowly here, swiftly there, in shreds and patches, it unrayed and entered upon the time of rest.

The slopes of Yarner were hung as for a pageant, and the personal fashion and custom of manifold trees lent a pomp and diversity to the spectacle that a wood of one sole timber cannot know. Here larches were aflame, and their pavilions of lemon light gleamed against the russet and tawny of the woods; here the birches already towered silvery through the thinning flutter of their leaves; here, an oak was green, while his neighbour ash showed dreary grey creeping to blackness through her verdure. Fairest of all the stately things that ascended above the prevalent radiance now kindling over Yarner, did the beeches rise; for upon them autumn stole with delicious touch to trace the anatomy of drooping boughs in flicker of flame; to light the shoulders of each gracious tree with gold and feather their finials with red gold.

The hills spread melting and of a liquid lustre where ran together all tones of honey and amber; in sunshine they warmed to rose and orange; in shadow they dimmed and cooled to delicate, chill fawn, or a brown and sepia; but ever across the darkest passages were flecked and spattered spots and little leafy galaxies of light upon the bough; while against even the shining places of far-flung fern or massy boughs aflame, there persisted the greater glitter of single, ineffable light points, flashing sun-bright upon the earth-bright heath or spinny edge. And though sad-coloured passages opened in the midst of these riotous splendours, where the rowan faded a misty grey: where the leaf of the lichen-clad thorns was sped, and the dogwood had sunk into a sulky purple; yet such sober things served but to heighten the general conflagration. At high noon, or in the blaze of great sunsets, a seeing eye ached before this bravery and sought the dim dingle, the shadow-haunted goyle, or the company of certain pines, that now shone out with blue of azure set in the fiery garniture of the fall.

Upon the open spaces dead heath and bracken spread

a thick, warm pelt upon the glades, like to the genial colour of a brown bear ; but whereas the heather had universally perished, save for a splash or twinkle of purple, the eagle fern was not all down, and, after the fashion of greater things, declared the purpose and peculiarity of each frond. By the fallen stem towered one still green and erect ; intermediate reaches struggled upright still amid the prostrate legions, and showed no more than a powder of yellow upon their verdure. Thus even to the fern this multifarious personality persisted, with difference of uncurling in time and colour, peculiarity of passing, subtle divergence in texture and quality and virtue of the plasm—secrets all to be guessed at to-day and solved to-morrow. For since we perceive that some rise out from the herd, even as man and beasts ascend above kind and kinship ; search may anon probe deeper, discover the significance of such distinctions, and so triumphantly come at the real good and evil of the *silva*—supposing that it hides in these physical qualities. And as the tree expresses its own nature and distinction amid the forest of trees, so of the myriad leaves that deck these million boughs, each is its very self and a thing unique. This one turns ash-coloured ; it wrinkles and shrivels and falls untimely at the first breath of change ; its twin holds stoutly on, grows red and gold to the bite of the frost and defies the wind and the rain, that it may play its little part in the glory of the hour. Not the lifelong woodman knows the real strength and weakness of the forest in the esteem of nature, nor measures the struggle, nor marks the victory. What are the trees fighting for ? Why are they fighting at all ? For mastery is it, or for arborial happiness, or the fullest terms of self-expression within the powers of a tree ? How comes it about that though their place is together, and that united they stand to conquer storm and winter, and so prosper in a fashion impossible under isolation, yet, deeper than this gregarious instinct is the egregious prompting to battle ? While making common cause for common weal, they wage a deadly internal war within their own ranks, and every tree will smother, choke, starve its own seedling springing at its feet so long as it holds the power to do so—will rob its

children of the sunshine above and the food in the earth beneath, while rob it can.

Now Yarner ascended to the full passion of her colour glory, and as slowly sank therefrom. The leafy harvest garnered of the year was cast from her. It fell and flew; it whirled in a dance of death away on wild winds up into the sullen clouds, when great tempests shook the forest; it dropped through breathless and starlit nights, leaf by leaf from tree-top to tree-root, making loud whispers in the fall through silence, and uttering a crisp, unceasing stridulation. For each emitted a succession of tiny sounds in its descent as it struck this bough and that; and breathed finally a last murmur, like a sigh, as it sidled to earth amid the congregation of its kind. And at such times, even in the stillest night, if a breath stirred the wood, there was a sudden increase in the small voices of the loosened leaves, and a heightening of the whisper where many set out on their descent together.

Now death and life are the twin pageant masters, and, as ever, their purposes depend upon each other. Autumn has drawn a radiant mantle over summer, a robe of rainbows, as symbolical of dissolution as the charnel house; yet the passing of the leaves darkens no conscious intelligence with a sense of death. It is felt rather as an essential, recurrent flash and foam on the deep waters of life, that roll beneath it, when the long year's sunset shines upon their waves. But the dead tree that thrusts forth here in the forest, robbed of all dancing, delicate branch and twig, shorn, stricken and stunted, staring from the fire and glow like a silver skeleton at the autumnal feast—the dead tree it is that writes death into the forest and towers pallid and heart-festered through a brief decade before it falls and spreads matured corruption for life to root in. Life is ever on the watch for death, and not only the withered leaf and cankerous bough fall to earth in the forest: life also descends with them in rain of flying seed and berry. A new generation of acorn and ash-key, beech-mast and filbert, will inherit the dominion of Yarner, and fortify its boundaries against destruction after bird and beast and worm have taken their full need.

And still the truth lurks hidden, as deep as gem in heart of mountain; quest for it saddens here, maddens there. All ultimate purpose evades conscious intelligence; any ultimate purpose appears profoundly doubtful. The crushing imperatives of nature: slavery and labour alone stare forth nakedly at all seasons; but the very concept of nature, in its vagueness, casts down more than it heartens and stands for a narcotic rather than a tonic force—since all confession of ignorance must be depressing. To understand is impossible, and our failure drives faint hearts upon a suspicion that there is nothing to understand. Yet, were it even so, this manifestation of matter in shape of many trees growing upon a wild place, is powerful to touch the spirit of man. Its phenomena stamp with their proper signet of mystery and wonder; they cheer or chill; they challenge; they satisfy never, and they send none empty away.

The open mind is vital, for that only receives, that only hungers and begs, that only comes forth from a forest's shadow lit by the aura of such communion. They who approach, preoccupied with life, careful and troubled, blinded by opinion, husked and scaled in supernatural conviction, proud of their sciolisms, fanatic in their Art formulæ—all such bear from these confines no more than a withered leaf clinging to their feet, or a clawed seed to their raiment.

CHAPTER II

THE day at best was dark, for low cloud-banks ran over the Moor and hung heavy above Yarner; but beneath the trees, where oaks still held the leaf, it seemed that night was near. Gloom buried the woods; the wet air was full of the scent of moss; underfoot the ways were silent and sodden, for the crisp noise and busy movement of the fallen leaf had been stilled awhile by torrential rains.

To Drusilla Redstone every manifestation of her maiden haunts returned in precious memories, and though a pang often killed her peace and woke her to miserable wonder before some familiar tryst; though the curtains now and again lifted from a scene memorable and sacred to another than her husband, such was the woman's emotional character in its clash of contradictions that contentment rather than trouble reigned.

She moved now through this familiar twilight not unhappily, and saw on every hand repeated the scenes proper to the time. The return to Yarner had chimed with the mighty event of marriage, and that experience, breaking upon her life, served to deepen the abyss that seemed to separate the present from the past. The forest's self did not bridge it. Drusilla turned her back on everything that had gone before, and close companionship with Redstone helped her to do so. In some doubt, and influenced by more forces than one, she wedded him with little anticipation that her new life would brighten into a blessed thing, or that, on her side, she might have power to realise his joyful expectations. But swiftly after marriage her horizons had lifted; light and air and enlargement of ideas had come. With Redstone it was good to live.

He never troubled about her inner nature ; he worshipped her and lifted her to a dizzy height ; but he was strong and not uxorious ; he was cheerful, lived on the surface, and probed neither his own nor any other man's secrets of disposition. A great charity marked him, and from the lofty standpoint of his own good fortune he could find it in him to sympathise with all men. Nor did he stop at that : there was in him a rare trick to take pains for other people and do kind actions that must go unpaid for ever. He was hot-tempered and quick to take fire at real or fancied wrong ; but when he erred, he forgot it as quickly as when he did a gracious deed. He had, too, a saving sense of the humour of life. He laughed at the pitiful and futile—laughed at his own vagaries as often as at another's. He took himself no more seriously than other people. He held existence on a light rein, and, believing in nothing and fearing nothing, won some of a child's joy from life—that pagan zest recorded as a possession of the Golden Age—an unclouded content with to-day and trust in to-morrow. John Redstone never looked behind, and he never looked very far ahead. For the past, he was satisfied to let impenetrable curtains hide it, and in the fine fervour of his present delights with Drusilla, the past indeed was well lost. As to the future, he only pondered it on her account. Unconsciously his attitude influenced her in everything. While Snow, with his loftier ideals and acute self-consciousness, had led her in his own path and fostered a natural morbidity, Redstone's more easy-going attitude to life (combined with a love of laughter that the other lacked), served to banish doubt and fear, and breed not indifference, but a spirit of serenity that promised to become indifference.

She could not choose but contrast the men sometimes, and perceive the fundamental opposition in their philosophy of life. They differed as the dawn light differs from the sunset, the moon from the sun. One was higher than the other, and cleverer far ; but which was wiser ? The pity and compassion that Timothy loathed, Redstone practised ; the readiness to help the weak that Snow held weakness, John lost no opportunity of rendering. His nature was

benignant and generous—qualities of very doubtful value in the esteem of the other. There was, moreover, this radical difference between them: while Timothy analysed, weighed, reflected upon conduct, Redstone merely unfolded without deliberation, like the petal of a flower. He was a thoughtless wight of low mental calibre—merely a creature inherently humane and unconsciously alive to the rights of others and his obligations to his kind, according to the tenets of a conscience mother-taught. He had never weighed the teaching or thought about it. He had merely absorbed it and practised it. But he was also himself. His nature had not prevented him from destroying a fellow-creature in a fit of rage; though it had prevented him from suffering remorse or regret. Lot's death hurt none: had it done so, or reduced any innocent creature to need and suffering, Redstone would have acknowledged the two-fold effect of the action, and lamented it, in so far as it injured somebody else. He went further, and granted that he had injured the dead; but that he did not regret, since the dead had proposed to injure him. He proceeded with his life absolved of all discomfort; and not even dread of discovery and punishment cast a cloud on the radiant sky of his happiness at this season. He was glad to be in Yarner again, because Drusilla was glad.

His wife now climbed the wood to meet him, and presently she did so—at a little hollow where ran a path aloft in the higher coverts. She put down the frail in which she had brought him food, and he hugged her.

"Lord! to see you properly happy! 'Tis meat and drink to me," he said. "I never thought you could be so happy as you be, and I'll swear you never was afore we got hitched up."

"I never thought to be so happy."

He sat on a fallen tree, and fed. Then she showed him a little purple lobelia that she had picked, and thrust it in his coat.

"'Tis the rarest flower in Yarner, but not so rare as you, John!"

"To think what your eyes spy out! And I never seed it all these years."

They were in the rose light still, and played together while he ate and drank. He made her nibble his food and sip of the cold tea in an old spirit bottle that she had brought him.

"The leaves be too thick yet for pheasant shooting," he said; "but there's a brave show of birds by the look of it. I marked that to Amos Kingdon this morning. 'Ah,' I said, 'pears to me that there's a lot more pheasants than in my time,' I said. 'That's not your work, nor yet mine, Amos: that's Timothy Snow's work, and the credit should be his!' Old Amos sniffed, I warn 'e! Never did like Snow—the man was too masterful for him. And a master he'll be when he comes home, sure enough. Born to be, you might say."

A squirrel barked from a bough, and Drusilla smiled up at it. She could hear the name of Timothy without grief now, but not without ache. Her mind associated him with supreme suffering, and, without her volition, acted unjustly to him, misled in the subtle labyrinths of emotion and experience that extended between them. She ceased to show trouble at the mention of Timothy, and Redstone supposed that she ceased to feel it. Therefore he alluded to Snow when the occasion rose, though until he was convinced that Drusilla cared no more, he was heedful not to do so. Much, however, despite the happiness that had surprised her, she still hid from her husband, and a little she hid from herself. She smarted sometimes to find how indifferent she had become to the other, and felt almost guilty to perceive how well Redstone's easy way suited her. At first she found it in her heart, from the present snug happiness of autumn nights by her husband's side, to look back at the other man, envy his standpoint and suspect that his outlook, if a bleaker and a colder one, yet, by those very qualities, proclaimed itself as lifted higher in the scale of life than her own. Such reflection, however, became more rare, and in time she altogether changed her opinion, for she loved John Redstone better every day, and his unsubtle, generous character impressed her as more and more precious. She remembered Timothy's severe judgments and censures, and contrasted them with

her husband's large tolerance. But Snow had always seemed faultless, and could therefore, perhaps, afford to be impatient of others' faults; while John erred, and was the dearer for his humanity.

They went presently by a little stream that wound underneath a grove of alders. These still preserved a vigorous verdancy, while loftier trees rained down their leaves around them; and beneath, though the brake was down, lady fern, and buckler fern, shield fern, and harts'-tongue still preserved their green, and the wood sorrel's foliage had suffered no stain. The little river babbled briskly over a gravel bottom, and trout, like grey shadows, sped through it. Liverworts and mosses made vesture for the brink, and beyond this place, visible through a rift in the woods, there rose the shattered masonry of the mine. That sight always cast the thought of Drusilla in one direction, and neither she nor John ever hesitated to discuss the problem of Lot Snow's disappearance. But the man's theory had convinced her now, though for a time she clung to her own. At first she earnestly hoped that he might reappear alive, since any horror must be better than the capital horror of his death; any punishment must fall short of that terror a murderer must be assumed to feel; but Redstone had altered her views radically in this matter. He had brought her to see with his own eyes that no dread of the future troubled him, and that his conscience went ungalled. He had also convinced her that Snow was most certainly dead.

Now he repeated his opinion and theory of the event with his glance on the mine shaft.

"'Tis borne in upon me stronger and stronger that he's not far off," said John; and when the keeper spoke of "he" or "him," the dead was meant.

"He fell at my blow and lost his wits; and then, when you and me was away, he come to again in the dark, and groped to seek his pony. 'Twas gone. Then moving on, maimed and dazed in the dark—for dark it was by then—he falled in somewheres and broke his neck. He might have travelled out of Yarner up to the Hey Tor quarries or other holes round about; or he might have

gone no more than ten yards and fallen into one of them deep rifts by the mine itself. There's places there if you fell in, you'd never more be heard of. And that's what he did, very like. Sometimes I think I'll have a hunt myself—just to satisfy my interest—but then I think I won't, for if I found the carcase of the old rascal, what should I do about it?"

She winced.

"Let the thing be forgot. You didn't mean nothing like that. Men have hit men in anger before now and nothing come of it."

"I don't trouble about that. I'd pull his bones out of any pit and not turn a hair. But there's another side as well as my interest. Timothy Snow's case will be a good bit altered, they tell me. Nought can be done for seven year if Lot ban't run to earth."

"'Tis no odds at all," she said. "For practical purposes Timothy will have everything. There's only his aunt to say 'no,' and she's praying for his return to hand over all."

He nodded.

"Quite right, too. 'Tis terrible interesting to know what that man will make of money and power. A great mind he hath, and very brave opinions. And now he'll be able to utter 'em without fear; because the shoe-licking world will take anything from the rich, and what was damned impudence and socialism and all that when he was a gamekeeper, will be sound sense now."

"He'll be like to work more good with the money than his uncle—that's certain sure," she said.

"Ess fay! And when I see the man doing wise things, and practising what he preached, I'll say, 'Ah, Master Timothy! But for Johnny Redstone, you'd never have had such a chance to shine afore the nation!'" He laughed at the idea. "There 'tis!" he declared. "None will give me any credit—'credit' no! The halter's my portion, according to man's justice. But neither one nor t'other will belong to me. Only we know the truth of things; and we shall watch very well content to see Tim at his work."

"I wonder if he'll marry now?"

"Marry? Surely, sooner or late. 'Twill take him a good few years, I doubt not—getting over your change of mind. Though you had as much right to change your mind as any other. Love's free, and love's got to be free, and you could no more keep it burning for him when it went out, than you could put it out for me when by good luck I found the trick to light it again. 'Tis all in that word. His fire went out and mine kept in. Love's a difficult thing, and harder far for a woman than a man, because there's a lot of silly unwritten laws seemingly that hamper her and keep her mouth shut when she'd like to open it, and make her open it when she'd sooner not. But you—you was above all that foolery, and had the pluck of a thousand common women; and because you couldn't love the man no more, you wasn't ashamed, even at cost of your suffering and his rage, to tell him straight. And right you were, for now all's above board, and you can meet him fair and square; and so can I."

She did not pursue this subject, but made a diversion. They were by the stew-pond now, for their woodland way had brought them to it. The still water spread like a sheet of dark jade amid the flame of the trees. Beside it stood certain buckthorns whose foliage was crimson and whose berries were black. Great scarlet fungi splashed the mossy road, and a white swan, seeing Drusilla, set out to swim across the pond to her for food. She found some fragments in the frail, and the bird devoured them.

A fir tree had fallen from a bank, and crossed the road at the height of a man's shoulder.

"I must see Saul Butt," said the keeper; "he don't know about this accident, and if Sir Percy finds it afore he do, there'll be a row."

"Sir Percy's grandson is home again—Mr Eustace."

"He is, and he'll be after that beautiful creature, Audrey Leaman, once more, I reckon. They Champernownes never know when they be beat. But she's a bit too fly to play about with him. Little liar! She told me he'd offered to marry her!"

"I wonder if Timothy will think of her—now," mused Drusilla; but her husband doubted it.

"Not he. She never was his sort, else he wouldn't have falled in love with you. She's a rare girl, and I like her, and she likes me ; but she ban't the one to marry Timothy Snow."

"The sparks would soon fly."

"And so would she."

CHAPTER III

It was not often that Audrey Leaman quarrelled with her father, and indeed, while the possibility of using her in the game of life persisted, no parent could have kept a child's affection more carefully than did Willes Leaman of Middlecot. But busy neighbours had told him that his daughter saw too much of her postman and of Frederick Moyle, the constable; therefore, since Timothy Snow was about to return home, a free and a rich man, the farmer tackled Audrey in earnest, and exhibited a severity very unusual. It sprang from one cause—a fact his daughter well knew—but he pretended that his reason was different.

"A Leaman," he said—"a Leaman to carry on unbeknownst with a married man! 'Tis a shameful thing, Audrey, and the like was never heard in our family. And him only a twopenny-halfpenny postman at best. Where's your pride? You know, none better, how the people talk, and how lightning quick they are to blaze it out if one of the bettermost slips. And where there's smoke there's fire, and a young woman, especially such a beautiful creature as you, can't be too careful of her behaviour in public and private."

Audrey laughed.

"I know who's frightened you," she said, "one of them two old sisters at Bag Tor Mill. I was out that way for a walk, and saw a grey weasel looking round the corner of the washing in the meadow. 'She'll tell she's seen you and me walking here,' I said to my friend, and——"

"There 'tis!" burst out her father. "Your 'friend,' indeed! A nice friend for a maiden—another woman's husband!"

"You're all behind the times, father. I hear a bit through Mr Eustace, who will be talking when I chance

to meet him. 'Tis a thing of every day for a married man to have a woman friend beside his wife, and for a married woman to have a man friend beside her husband."

"More shame to 'em, then. And, whether or no, you ban't married, and if you don't watch it you'll end by missing a husband of your own altogether."

"There's always other people's husbands," she said.

"You may joke," he answered, "though such jokes show only too clear how loose you be taking to think. You may joke, Audrey, and I daresay postmen and policemen and a few more like them laugh at your jokes; but I don't laugh, and your mother don't laugh, and the proper, sensible, marrying men looking out for wives don't laugh. They may waste their time in light moments with the light sort; but when life stares 'em in the face, and they've got to choose a partner, they look elsewhere."

"What's that to me?"

"Nothing now, but some fine day you'll wish you'd thought upon it. You won't be young always, and you won't be beautiful always."

"Yes, I shall," she said. "I'm the thin, light-built, graceful sort that wear to the end. I shan't never get full blown, if I take care of myself and keep going. Plenty of time for me. I won't let a husband knock me to pieces. I'm not common cloam—so I've been told, anyhow—and the chap that marries me will have to understand that, and hear my views and learn what he may expect and what he must not expect. Grandfather used to say, 'Tis no good growing old unless you grow artful.' That's all right. And I've grown too artful to grow old yet a while. And marriage is to put on the clock a lot too fast."

"You puzzle me," he declared. "Once, when Tim Snow was about, you didn't talk like that. And now he'll soon be about again, and a good bit closer than he was."

"Yes, I know. But I've learned a lot since he went away. 'Tisn't that grapes are sour, as some might think, but I've got a bit beyond him now. I've had talk with a higher man than him, and there's a lot in blood, and I'm spun fine enough to see that."

"If you're playing about with a gentleman—so called—you look out for yourself!" he said angrily. "For you know how I hate that class—knaves all—and a proper fool you'll look presently, and—and if such a thing happened, God's my judge, but I'd cast you off!"

"If what happened?" she asked. "You didn't use to think me a fool. And because I don't share your class-hate against 'em, you've no right to talk like that. I'll cast *you* off if you bully me, father—yes, I will! What have I done to hear you lift your voice against me so? When I say a gentleman, I mean a gentleman—class or no class. He says there's no such thing as a class of gentlemen, any more than there is a class of criminals. And he's taught me a great deal worth knowing, and shown me that Timothy Snow's not the high-water mark of what a man can be. Why, I like that chap Johnny Redstone better than him! And so in the end did Drusilla—the girl Timothy meant to marry. That's a facer for any man, and will open Tim's eyes pretty wide I bet."

"You talk," said her father, "and you pretend more than you mean, and you think you're made of finer stuff than your father and mother, because some scamp, for his own doubtful reasons, tells you so; but have a care and behave more seemly, and let your life be what a maiden's life should be. And that's not always gadding about round corners with a man. I say again you'll soon lose your character, and that once lost, it will never be found no more. I don't fear for you, because you're a lot too selfish and fond of Number One to hurt yourself, or give anything for nothing; but, in a place like this, a girl in your position owes something to her family, and you'll do well to remember the debt. I've educated you above your station, and I did it proudly, but I don't want it flung in my face now, and I don't want to hear no more of what the upper class women—so to call 'em—do and don't do. I want you to behave, and you've got to behave so long as you bide at Middlecot."

She considered, and surprise rather than anger influenced her.

'So I will, then," she said, "and why not? And don't

you think that you and mother are not more to me than anybody else in the world, because you are. If you'd spoke sooner, I'd have acted sooner, but I didn't know I was doing anything to vex you running about and getting fun and 'sense where I could find them. And the gentleman was only Mr Eustace Champernowne, after all. He's straight enough, God knows, and a very clever man with high moral ideas and great ambitions to make his mark. You'd do lots and lots of things, and think no harm of 'em, that he would die rather than do. And don't you fear for the postman, neither. As a matter of fact, he's going to Bristol—got work there. And his mother lives there, too—so he'll have somebody on his side against his wife. He and his wife are more friendly now he's going."

"You run on so," said her father. "I never can tell what's jest and what's serious with you."

"You'll see when Timothy comes back," she answered. "One more chance he shall have—perhaps—for all I'm not his first love. But I'm terribly afraid I shall see his faults too clear to stand him any more. 'Tis the humble and meek ought to inherit the earth, and yet here's Master Tim—neither meek nor humble, whatever else he may be—he'll have all his uncle's property, and if I don't take him, no doubt we shall quarrel like cats over his land and mine after you and mother are dead and gone."

She calmed her father down, and sent him away cheerfully building on false foundations. For her mind sought Timothy Snow no more, and her postman and policeman were alike sunk to shadows in her regard. The former, indeed, was reconciled to his wife, and therefore became uninteresting from her standpoint. Another attraction filled her horizon, and the possibility of a thing that she had laughed at and regarded as impossible began to dawn upon her. She reflected over a future widely different from any her father's ambition planned, or the voice of the people prophesied. But it was not a course to take in a light spirit. It involved much patience and protracted toil, the experience of humility, the practice of artifice.

Whether the game was worth the candle continued to be a question, but she came nearer to answering that question in the affirmative. And a man there was who laboured very steadily to make her do so.

She set about a letter now, and wrote page after page, conscious that she could not write more than one pair of eyes would love to read. And while she played with tremendous possibilities lightly and humorously, her father entered 'The Coach and Horses' to see a neighbour or two, hear others' news and relate his own.

Amos Kingdon was there, and the farmer found him talking with Blackaller and Thomas Turtle, the carrier. They broke off at his coming and listened to him.

"No more news of Timothy?" he asked. "I haven't seen Miss Snow for a good bit. I suppose he'll be on his way home afore long."

"I fell in with Sibella Snow but yesterday," declared Ned Blackaller. "She's better, but suffering terrors from her inside, and forced to take physic. And whether Tim Snow's mother will come along with him be doubtful still. It must be settled by now, however, for he was to set sail afore the end of the month."

"And what do your girl think about it, Leaman?" asked the carrier. "But Master Timothy always carried his head pretty high in the air, and now he's well-to-do, maybe he'll look higher than her."

"'Once bit, twice shy,'" declared Kingdon. "'Twas a pretty sharp facer for him when that nice, everyday creature, married to Redstone, changed her mind. I guess he'll bide a bachelor now. His pride wouldn't brook a second fall like that."

"There was a mystery in it," answered Willes Leaman. "We may know the rights some day, and on the other hand we may not; but there was more in that than appeared. However, the young woman's happily wedded by all accounts, and no doubt Johnny Redstone makes her a better husband than what Snow would have done. Because he's a humbler man, better suited to her, and in her own rank of life. Of course Snow was above her."

"So far as that goes, him and your daughter would pair

very proper," admitted Blackaller. "She's terrible lovely to look at. Us all wondered long ago how he could resist her."

"We shall see when he comes back. But you men mustn't think that my girl would run after him, or anything low like that. 'Tis only the gentlefolk go husband-hunting. We've got too much self-respect, I hope; and if Snow don't want her, you may feel very sure she don't want him."

"'Tis a strange and ugly truth how the gentlefolk make marriage a business," admitted Blackaller; "though, of course, we know you wouldn't feel like that, Leaman."

He turned as he spoke and winked at Kingdon and Turtle. For it happened when the farmer entered that Ned had been explaining the situation, and assuring his guests that the farmer would pursue Snow to the bitter end. It was notorious that Leaman desired the match, and the host of 'The Coach and Horses' did not hesitate to declare that Audrey would run down Timothy Snow on his return. She had played fast and loose, so Ned believed, while there remained a doubt of Timothy's position; but now that he was enriched, she would hesitate no more and capture him. Indeed, Blackaller hinted at this now.

"If she likes him, of course your girl will marry him—trust her for that. But, as you say, the Leaman people are far too fine to hunt for a rich man. And with such a bowerly piece as your girl, 'tis the men will come hunting for her."

"Which they do, I'm sure," added Turtle, "for you never see her without one. A fine thing like her will make a great match presently, and if Snow looks high, I dare say your daughter looks higher. She may marry a proper gentleman yet."

But the father of Audrey exploded at this possibility.

"Damn the gentlemen!" he said. "I'd sooner see her in her grave than hitched to one of them—idle, dishonest, selfish trash! What have we got to thank them for? I'll give a golden sovereign to anybody that can tell me."

"For education," answered Blackaller. "They'm teaching the people; and, by the same token, there's a new Secondary School coming to Newton afore a year's out."

"We be teaching ourselves," answered Leaman, "and devil a bit of schooling would the poor man's child get if the rich had their way. But there's pressure on the squire now, like there's pressure on the parson. Lot Snow showed me that. It seems that the learned men of science have knocked the bottom out of a lot that parson used to tell, and now, when he goes in the pulpit, he don't thunder no more about what's true and what ban't. He's all for singing small, and excusing himself and his nonsense, and explaining away this, and explaining away that. He don't threaten any more; he only bleats. His teeth be drawn, and soon the nation will disestablish the Church, and then they parsons will have to find out the truth about themselves. And the same with squire—his teeth be drawn, too. He ban't going to batten on the poor any more, just because his father and his grandfather did; he ban't going to get everything for nothing any more. For why? Along of this education that our side be giving the people. It grows by leaps and bounds, and we be sweeping away all their machinery for keeping us under very quick, now."

"Drink, and don't get in a rage," said Turtle. "All the same, I'm very well pleased to hear you talk like that, though, for my own part, it ban't so much the gentleman proper I object to, but that nasty, shop-keeping, meddling, filching, lower middle class sort that get into the Councils, and take on all the work for their private ends. Big toads in little puddles they be. If there's one sort I pray to be delivered from 'tis the Guardians. Curse 'em! 'Guardians'—what do they guard? Their own fat pockets. Whose interests do they fight for? The poor? No, by God! their own. The coarse-minded devils think that the poor have got no pride, and they probe with their claws and trample with their hoofs—blast 'em! The questions they ask! You wouldn't ask a pig down on his luck such questions, let alone a pauper. The Poor Law's a filthy thing at best, and I'd vote socialist if only to see that swept away."

"Good sense," declared Blackaller. "They low-bred, money-grubbing shop-people are a cruel class, and would

sell their mothers' skins for money. They grind the face of the poor far worse than what the rich do. The rich don't pretend they like us. They hate us, and we hate them, and there's no pretence. But these half-way jackals and vultures—they do pretend. They play for their own foul hands all the time—against rich and poor both."

"And suck our blood while they pretend to lick our wounds," cried Turtle. "To hell with them—that's where I'd have them. And when we rise in our might and majesty 'tis the smug, sticky shopkeepers I'd string up first. 'Poor Law Guardians'—the name stinks! 'Tis only a beastly sort of mind would sink to the work. But when you know why they do it—to rob the powerless poor—you understand all about 'em."

"Educate — educate — educate, be the word," said Blackaller. "But it must never be said as the rich educated the poor—I won't hear that. 'Tis nonsense on the face of it; for the rich be far too clever to cut their own throats; and well they knew that to make the poor understand was to queer their own pitch once for all. We've fought Church and State both for knowledge—and we're winning. We've got to thank neither one nor t'other for anything, and even when they be swept away, like a dead man out of mind, 'twill take generations and generations of cleansing and scouring afore we get the smell of 'em out of the world."

Amos Kingdon showed great uneasiness at these sentiments.

"You'll frighten honest men away from here, Ned, if you ban't more careful," he said sorrowfully. "You go too far altogether; and I wouldn't answer for the consequence if the lord of the manor got to know about it—or your brewers either. Landmarks is landmarks, and bulwarks is bulwarks, and if you had your way you'd throw down every one of 'em. And if I thought you meant half you said, so fierce and rash and reckless—or Turtle either, or farmer here as well, then I'd take it as a very serious and dangerous thing, and keep your company no more. You forget Who manages the world, and Who gives the power into human hands, and 'tis indecent

and unfair to a large body of well-meaning, busy men to say as God has forgot the Poor Law Guardians."

Willes Leaman laughed and jested.

"Oh no, my dear man, me and my friends wouldn't say for a minute as God's forgot 'em, would we, Thomas Turtle? God helps those who help themselves—eh? Then 'tis very certain He's on the side of the Guardians, for nobody can deny they do that!"

CHAPTER IV

At Yarner edge, upon the old tram line, there walked Frederick Moyle and Audrey Leaman. They met by appointment, and it was he who had made it.

The man now passed through a period of concealed stress and tension, for the event of his life was at hand, and, by anticipating it through many weeks, he had beggared his nervous energy and exhausted his imagination. Such was the activity of his mind before the approaching triumph that he seemed already to have lived through it in every detail. There was only lacking the applause of his neighbours, and the consciousness that a revenge long delayed had reached completion. He turned now from the thought of Timothy Snow to a possibility he still cherished as resultant of his triumph. He had not abandoned all hope of Audrey Leaman for a wife, and in truth the maiden's devious line of conduct lent some colour to his ambition. For she continued very friendly; she accepted little gifts; she walked with him by private ways, and even confided some secrets to him.

He had hoped therefore, that, in the light of the glory presently to shine upon him, Audrey might be tempted, and he pictured himself as promoted to more important work in a city with her by his side. His mind at this season was a little off the balance; otherwise he might have perceived that there was much in her thoughts concealed from him. But during the present interview a great change had flashed over the ambition of Frederick Moyle. It seemed in Audrey's presence that there might be more notable achievements even than

his forthcoming revenge. He began to consider whether this woman would be a more precious possession than fame, and whether, if indeed she cared still for Snow, he might not use Snow to win her in a very different manner from that first intended.

By a sudden vagueness before his speeches, by wandering eyes and her anxiety to learn the time, Audrey now indicated that Moyle was not interesting her vitally, though the things that he spoke were vital.

It had come to his ears from various quarters that she awaited the return of Timothy Snow with much excitement; indeed, she herself did not hesitate to admit it to Moyle. This she told him for her own purpose, and that he might repeat the fact; but her real reasons for conveying the impression of acute interest in the matter were known to none. Moyle, therefore, took them at the face value, and suspected that Audrey was still anxious to win Timothy. The thought inspired him quite suddenly to consider a new line of action. The magnitude of the idea unsettled him, and he felt that he could not set it clearly forth at such short notice. He perceived the delicacy and danger of so doing. Indeed, for the moment, before the extreme difficulty of the task, he was almost minded to abandon it. He chose a middle way, approached the subject tentatively, and kept on sure ground. There appeared, however, a preliminary need to probe Audrey's own hopes and dreams; and he prepared to do so, quite ignorant of the fact that such hopes were only simulated to gain her private ends. The comedy proceeded lazily for a time, and it was not until his companion opened the way to what Moyle desired to discuss that the interest sharply deepened for both of them.

"He's to be home to-morrow," she said, after desultory talk on various subjects. "Tim Snow, I mean. 'Twill be rather interesting to see how he takes his money and all that. He'll carry his head pretty high, no doubt. And I shall feel a pleasure in saying that 'tis all nonsense, and that I believe Lot Snow's coming home again some fine day."

"You can save your breath, then," answered the other,

"for Timothy Snow won't believe you. And that brings me to what I wanted to say, Audrey. You asked me just now what it was, and I put you off a minute and talked about lesser things, because for my life I didn't see quite how to begin."

"If 'tis about Timothy Snow, you might have begun right away, and then you wouldn't have bored me, as you did do coming down the hill. You know very well nothing would have interested me so much."

"Is that true? If so I want you to pull in your horns a bit. I'm on ticklish ground, I know that. I quarrelled with the man bitterly, and you remember if I had reason or not. You remember that down here, not half a mile from where we stand this minute, he struck me and cursed me; and since I was in the wrong—though your fault, Audrey—I could do nothing. I was terrible angered, then I vowed vengeance, and forgot I was a policeman, and, made a fool of myself. I know that only too well, and to a proud man like me 'twas bad to know it, and suffer it. It altered my life in a way. I'd been easy and a bit crooked here and there before that. But that blow seemed to let light into my mind, and show me life was a real, earnest thing. And when I thought about it in cold blood I got gradually to see that instead of hating Snow for what he had done, I ought to have been obliged to him."

Audrey was interested in spite of herself.

"My goodness!" she said. "Who'd ever expect to hear you talk like that, Frederick?"

"It took me a long time to come to it; but I did, and I'm not ashamed to see things as they are. And you're not the only one I've spoke to like this. Ask Blackaller, or your father, or old Kingdon, the keeper. They've heard me say pretty bitter things against Snow; and so I took good care they should hear me eat my words, which I have done. I harbour no ill-will whatever against the man, and I'll be his friend as much as anybody when he comes back."

"That's all right, then; he'd sooner have you for a friend than an enemy, be sure."

"I wanted to make that clear first, Audrey; I wanted to make you understand I'm a real good friend to Snow henceforth, and don't harbour one drop of bad blood against him. You understand that? Very well; and now I come to the ticklish thing. And 'tis for love of you I speak it, Audrey. You'll see in a minute that what I'm going to say is said for my regard for you, and no other reason. In a word, Audrey, I beg you, for God's sake, to go very careful and cautious in your dealings with that man. Mind you, I'm saying nothing against him, and I hope with all my heart I never shall do; but there's a great mystery brewing. I'm trained as a policeman to see and almost feel in my veins when all's right and all isn't right. 'Tis a sort of instinct that men in my business get after a time, as they deepen in knowledge of human nature and human weakness. And I tell you, without one particle of ill-feeling to Timothy Snow—I tell you in sorrow—that you'll do well to hold off a little while from the man until you see how things fall out."

"Good Lord! what's in the wind now?" she asked.

"There's much in the wind always," he answered. "The wind's always full of seeds of good and bad. There's poison in the wind, and there's healing in the wind; but such things are invisible, and none can tell what breath brought them. None can know the wind was blowing the seeds of weeds or other ills till they sprout up presently and show themselves. But a man like me can smell what's in the wind in a way that common men can not. And it's borne in upon me, much to my trouble and sorrow, that the wind that blows for Timothy Snow have terrible evils hid in it."

"Whatever are you saying and thinking?"

"I'm thinking nothing. I'm keeping away from my thoughts day and night—dodging 'em and avoiding 'em. But 'tis in my sleep they won't be put off. 'Tis in my sleep the policeman in me comes out. And I dream ugly things, Audrey, and when I wake up the dreams won't be laughed away as dreams mostly can be."

"What do you dream, then—about Timothy?"

"Yes—about him; but what I dream, none will ever know—not even you. I haven't whispered this to anybody else; and I shouldn't have whispered it to you, but for the deep love I bear to you, and the dread I feel that you may go and make some terrible mistake, and wreck your life or some such thing."

"To hear you! It's like the mysterious man in the play we went to see at Newton Abbot. You don't mean——?"

"I don't mean anything definite at all—nothing you can put a name to or threaten the man with—or threaten me with for saying. That's hid, and I hope it will be hid for ever, and thankful to God I shall be if it all happens differently from what I fear. Leave it so. All there's any need for you to know is that, in my opinion, there's a cloud—so to call it—a dark cloud hanging over Timothy Snow. It may be nothing at all; it may clear away and come to nought, and I hope it will. But in the meantime I ask you, as your faithful friend, and for your own sake—for your own sake, Audrey—to keep off him, and go easy and—wait and watch a bit before you let him see you're friendly still. That's all that need be said."

"No, it isn't," she answered. "Good gracious me—I'm a woman, I believe—and d'you think that's going to content me? And such friends as you and I have been always! You've got to tell me a lot more than that, Freddy."

"There's no more to tell," he answered. "I'm only warning you because I love you better than anything else in the world, and because I've reason to fear there may be trouble waiting for Snow, and I don't want you to share the trouble."

"You've got a secret," she said, "and you've said a great deal too much now to draw back, and not tell me what it is."

"There's nothing to tell," he answered again. "A suspicion isn't a secret, though it may amount to a certainty; and my suspicion don't amount to a certainty. But I've got to put two and two together, and when I do, the result, so far, is a very ugly four. Secret, there's none."

Understand that I only say this much because you are what you are to me, and I don't want a shadow over you."

"I don't believe you," she said; "and I very much doubt if you feel as friendly to the man as you say you do. If you do, then 'tis him you ought to be warning—not me."

She did not guess how hard a thrust this was, but ran on and gave him time to recover from it and avoid the necessity of answering.

"It won't do, Freddy; I know you a lot too well. You've got to tell me—I'll—I'll give you a kiss if you will."

"No," he answered, glad to shift the centre of discussion, "I don't want no more kisses from you, Audrey. I look back at that sort of silly thing and regret it."

"Thank you!"

"I regret it because my point of view has changed. I'm a lot more serious-minded than I was, and I know very well it wasn't treating you properly to play the fool, and let you pull my moustache and kiss you, and all that feeble nonsense. I love you with all my heart and soul, and I say this: I ought to have shown you that I hold love to be a great and solemn thing and——"

"Have done!" she said. "I don't come to you for preaching—I get that from somebody else who means it. You don't. You're humbugging me, and I won't let you, you silly man!"

He was startled, for he believed that he meant what he said.

"I'm telling the truth," he declared.

"Then you're humbugging yourself," she answered. "We've been very good friends, and you know more about me than anybody alive—a long sight more than I'd ever tell any man I meant to marry. And I know you inside out, too. And I know you've got something up your sleeve against Timothy Snow. And you won't tell me what it is, but think to use it as a weapon against me, or him, or both."

"I swear there's nothing to tell—only a growing fear that there may be a hard row for him to hoe when he comes home."

"And you're going to set him to it? All right. You've

warned me, and I'll warn him. And now chuck that, and talk about something different, for I've only got ten minutes. Then I must go down past the old mine to meet—Drusilla Redstone. I promised to see her this evening."

But he made her vow faithfully that she would not speak to Snow of any danger until he saw her again. Then, led to an old interest by mention of the mine and sight thereof rising from the woods beneath, Audrey spoke of the past. She did not for an instant connect it with the recent conversation.

"I always feel creepy when I look at that place. I believe if anybody went there by night he'd see the ghost of Lot Snow. Poor old wretch—he was always good enough to me. He'd have left me something in his will, I believe, if he'd had the chance to make one. He'd have cut Timothy out of it, anyway. I wonder a clever chap like you wasn't able to find him, Freddy."

Vanity tempted Moyle to hint the truth, but he denied himself for the present. His plans loomed clearer.

"Wait—the last word isn't spoken on that subject. I've a sort of sure feeling that I shall be the one to unearth that mystery yet. I'm working hard enough, and you'll be the first to hear about it when the time comes."

"You've never told anybody about that hat?"

"Not a soul. But it may mean everything."

"It shows he was there, anyway. And, since it fell there, it surely shows he never went off. He wouldn't have gone and left it."

"That's your reasoning, but it won't do, Audrey. It don't follow because a man's hat is found in a place that he was there himself. It might have been took there for private reasons. Again, it don't show that he never left there, even if he ever was there. He might have been carried away."

"Nobody would carry him far."

"There are strange things going to happen," he said. "I'm not superstitious, or any foolery of that sort, but things are going to happen soon that will very much surprise everybody. I'm positive of that, though I couldn't tell you why. And you'll be in them—for good or evil."

She looked at him curiously, and thought of her own affairs.

"You're a queer chap—you've got the second sight, I believe. I reckon things are going to happen, too—afore long. When I see Drusilla, I'll ask her if her husband will look out for Lot Snow's ghost next time he passes the mine by night."

"Don't you make fun of that business," he said very earnestly. "If you do, you'll very likely live to be sorry for it. Don't mention the matter, or you may do a great deal of harm. If you was to say that, you'd make John Redstone wonder what you meant; and then he'd go poking about at the mine and talking, and very likely end by upsetting a great deal of time and thought that I've put into the thing. You've promised to say nothing for the present, and I hold you to that promise."

"All right—you can trust me," she said. "I want you to have the reward, and all the honour of the discovery."

"You do now. I'm thinking a time may come when you won't. But we'll leave it where you say for the minute."

They parted presently, and Moyle went off doubtful of Audrey's loyalty and distracted by his affection for her; while she, believing that he knew much more than he had told her, speculated how she might seduce his secrets from him.

Swiftly, however, she dismissed the subject, for a tryst with another man awaited her, and she was half an hour behind the promised time.

Not to Drusilla did Audrey hasten now, but to a dell in the hanging woods above Yarner House—a place secreted at the edge of the trees where yawned a quarry. Thence had the stone been cut that built the mansion, but now the place was deserted and overgrown. In it were hidden nooks and overhung crannies secure from observation of the passer-by. Here she came to find one waiting for her. He was a year younger than herself, the only son of a soldier, the grandson of a soldier, and heir presumptive of Yarner.

Audrey listened to him, and marked young Eustace Champernowne in the dust before her, stricken to his

heart, drowned with a frenzied passion of love. She beheld the spectacle with profound interest, and his deep reverence awoke a faint shadow of awe in her spirit. He was no soldier. His eyes and high brow spoke of intellect; his hand was an artist's. Simplicity and ingenuousness sat upon him. He quoted poetry that he had made to her. Utmost humility characterised his approach, and he was nervous before her and trembled. He spoke far over her head, and dealt in a finer grain of thought than she could appreciate. She, too, was nervous, for she had not yet learned to escape self-consciousness when with him. He might have tempted her more with rougher lovemaking; but to his glorified fancy she was a sainted piece of immaculate loveliness only to be approached by man on his knees. His love ennobled her, and of late she had begun to take herself more seriously in consequence. He was clever, and had distinguished himself at Oxford. He had explained his successes to her, and she doubted them not. Her shyness always wore off after she had listened to him for a while, and it did so now. She began to perceive that he spoke truth to her, and was in deadly earnest about the thing he desired to do. Her worldly wisdom doubted; her inclination tempted her. Young Champernowne's father was on service abroad, and his mother was dead. He came and went from Yarner, and regarded it as his home.

Audrey listened to his pleading, and sat on a mossy stone while he stood before her and spoke. He had never asked or offered to kiss her; he had often told her that she was a sacred thing in his eyes; unconsciously he had stilled her levity and increased her sense of responsibility before his passion. Of light-minded, pleasure-seeking women he spoke with profound contempt, and Audrey knew that but for the sleight of love he would have despised her. But she hid herself from him a little, and then, in secret, she modified herself a little that she might more nearly resemble his ideal. She was not in love, and while admiring his cleverness and revelation of a manner outside her experience, yet knew very well that had he belonged to her own class, she must have held him a very great bore.

This attitude was becoming modified, however, at the present stage in their friendship. Her old reckless theories changed as her experience increased. She had intelligence enough to perceive that such virgin love as the young man displayed was a rare and splendid manifestation. She knew her own capabilities also, and was aware that her quickness of mind, strength of intuition, and sovereign power over the male might, in another sphere of life, help her to the achievements that her lover prophesied from the profound depth of his passion.

She listened now, laughed sometimes, shook her head sometimes, studied the light and flash of his face, and marked how each word from her was quick to echo in his countenance its message of hope or doubt. Immensely experienced in the outer signs of love, she observed them as displayed in this man of breeding, and noted where they differed from those others who had loved her, and where they corresponded. It piqued her to feel his love was a finer and more delicate fire than any she had power to light in her own heart; and then she resented the opinion and took courage, and told herself that she was made not only to be loved nobly but nobly to love. She assured herself that she could love this man if she desired to do so; and that, once on the wing, her passion should soar as high as his own, and amaze him by its splendour. He did not guess at her voluptuousness, and she determined that it should be hidden from him. She tuned herself to his key as a matter of instinct. She chimed with all men thus: it was her source of greatest power. She knew in a flash how to please, and practised to please where she desired to do so. Even with this cultured man a native inspiration made her increase his love daily. Unconsciously she acted, for her ruling passion: to pleasure all men, had not as yet been subdued by love for one.

She had suffered many to excite her, and found erotic pleasure in this voice, this gaze, this gesture; but it was young Champernowne's hand that fascinated her most. With any other man, she would have possessed it and ordered it to stroke her cheek, hold her waist, or curl its long fingers into her hair; but she could not do this with

him. She was very careful not to make any mistake, lift a corner of the curtain on her frank, healthy animalism, or venture any overture that would either annoy him or set him on fire.

He discoursed of love to her, and told her his opinions. He startled her a great deal by his values, and by the weight he attached to things that she had held of no account. To him a kiss was a mighty matter; and she, who that very day had felt a hunger to kiss his hand, was glad that she had not done so. He told her that the history of the kiss would be the history of half the joy and sorrow in the world. A kiss had plunged nations into war; a kiss had shed rivers of blood; a kiss had betrayed the Saviour of the Earth. The kiss given, said he, was but a ghost, and fit only for the sterile limbo of futile things, unless returned. But when four lips went to a kiss, then it unsealed the heaven of heavens and lifted the portals of the sanctuary. To-day he was disturbed and more passionate than usual. He hungered to be nearer her; his self-control shook. She knew without words from him that he had to struggle with himself to keep his arms from enfolding her, and she was glad. He scarcely looked at her, but stared past her with troubled eyes. He moved his hands restlessly. Some emotion made him stretch his arms and yawn. She understood that, because she had seen other men do it.

She chose to shorten the interview and left him presently; but not before he had made her promise to meet him in the same place three days later. She took the rhyme that he had made to her and put it under her collar against her breast. She knew that it would please him to see her do so; and she knew that he stood and watched her out of sight when she left him and climbed away up a heathery hill behind the place of their meeting.

CHAPTER V

THERE haunted Drusilla Redstone a spirit that prompted her often to interfere with her own happiness, and while her marriage had served to improve her mental stamina, yet it could not dim memory, and it could not alter character. The circumstances that had separated her from Timothy Snow were rendered more vivid by his return, and there came an hour when she could keep them to herself no more. To tell Timothy was idle and mischievous, in her opinion, and she was content to remain under his suspicion in the matter. He must think her heartless and irrational for ever; and that she could bear. But it seemed to Drusilla at this season that her husband should be told. She had indeed wondered sometimes why he never mentioned the subject, why, even now that her former lover had returned to England, he never raised the question of what led Drusilla to change her mind concerning him. But delicacy or indifference sealed his lips. He defined his own future attitude to Snow, and did not hesitate to hope that Timothy would prove friendly; but he never so much as asked his wife what her attitude was to be. It surprised her a little that the events of the past should slip so easily and swiftly from his memory. He knew that she had attempted to put an end to her life, and could not be ignorant that Timothy Snow was largely the cause of the action; but now he merely spoke of Snow's return as an event of interest. He failed to see that it could have a painful side for his wife; or, if indeed he guessed it, the suspicion was hidden. Drusilla's motives for burrowing back into the past at this juncture were mixed, and her own peculiarities of character fought with

her judgment. There was also an ingredient of small pique in her determination—an element of stupidity. Her whole heart and soul centred on John Redstone now. He had come mightily to dominate her life and thought. She lived for him; but she was jealous, and exacted return in kind. She began to feel, then, that his attitude towards that great event of the past was imperfect, and she explained to herself that it must be so, because his knowledge was imperfect. She determined to complete his knowledge; and on a night when they had gone to bed together, she spoke.

They often talked before they slept, for they retired early when Redstone's work did not keep him in the woods by night; and day always began for them at this season with the dawn.

"I saw Snow this morning," he said. "I didn't tell you afore, but kept the news for a titbit. Looking fine, and just a something about him different, that his change of luck was sure to bring."

"Perhaps it wasn't that," she said.

"Perhaps not. He was civil, but stand-offish; or maybe, owing to my way of forgetting the past so quick, I took it for granted that he'd do the same. But 'tis easier to forget victory than defeat, and no doubt seeing me reminded him pretty sharply of you, and how things were once between you. God knows, when I come to look back, I felt sorry for him, for I know what he lost—better than he knows himself I know what he lost. He's only a man, and I can't expect him to be just the same to me as he was when he thought he was going to marry you; I see that very clear. I must be patient—that's the least I can be with the poor chap. He'd gladly give his cash for what it won't buy, no doubt—like lots of people. However, 'tis too late now, and he's had plenty of time to get over it. You had your reasons for what you've done, and you were right. No matter for all his money and brains and good looks and power—you were right; because you know by now that you'd never have been so happy with any other man on earth but me. Say you know it; say you know it, Dru! I'm never weary of hearing you say it."

"And I'm never weary of saying it," she answered. "Never, never in my happiest, hopefulest moment did I guess I could be such a joyful creature as I am along with you, or find life so precious—every moment of it. But——"

"What do you want to drag in a 'but' for?"

"Johnny," she said, "did you ever wonder why I changed my mind about Mr Snow?"

"Of course I did. I just wondered, and then let the thing slide. I was never much of a one for asking people why they did things—reasons and motives and such like. You changed your mind because you reckoned he wasn't the husband for you, and you had the quick wit to see 'twas better to make him miserable for a time than for ever. You was strong enough to chuck him, because nature rose high in you, and you couldn't abide to see all your life gone wrong, and his also. And so you did what must have been a terrible hard thing for a shy, tender toad like you to do, and got clear. And such was the strain to have to do it, that for a bit you went out of your blessed mind altogether, and felt life was no good and had better be shuffled off. That's how I read it; and then the bestest luck that ever happened to me did happen, and I got you back to life by the skin of your teeth. And after you began to live again—slowly, slowly—you came to feel that I was the mate for you: and here we are—one. That's enough for me: and if I died to-morrow I should have had more than my share of luck—to have had you—to have had you for my own for weeks and weeks. And I hope to God 'twill be for years and years."

She hesitated to speak before this ardent answer, but her instinct was set on telling him the truth, whatever the consequences might be. She felt that to do so was a vain thing, that it could but give him sorrow and certainly yield her no joy; but her obstinate familiarity possessed her. She spoke quietly and told him that his theory was mistaken.

"You'll guess that I wouldn't say this if I wasn't sure of myself and you. A wonderful tangle happened in the

past, Johnny—put your arm round me again—a tangle far more strange and dreadful than you think for. You've explained it like your own simple, clear-seeing self; but 'twasn't so. I don't know why I should strip it all bare again, and yet something in me stronger than common-sense cries out to me to do it."

"If 'twas worth telling, why didn't you tell it sooner?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "And yet I do know. If I'd told you before—you—you wouldn't have loved me any more, I reckon."

He was interested.

"Good God! That's a strong thing to say. What are you dreaming about?"

Then she told him the truth, and explained how Lot Snow had urged her to throw over his nephew for Timothy's own ultimate welfare; how she had done so at cost of her own desire to live.

"You see," she said, "how terribly and strangely it worked out. When you killed that old man, in a sudden righteous rage at his hateful ways, you swept away the thing that stood between me and Timothy Snow. But it was too late then. After I gave him up and wouldn't tell him why, he raged against me, and said words that can never be unsaid, and thought thoughts that can never be unthought. The end was the same, and I was parted from him for ever really, though for a time I fancied we might come together again. I'm hiding nothing—not even my dreams—a distraught woman's dreams though they were. But there's the truth."

Redstone was perturbed.

"Women—good powers—you're creepy things!" he said. "But you can't stop there. If 'twas like that with you, how is it you're my wife now?"

"Because I changed," she answered. "I'm telling you nothing but truth, and if it changes you, John, so much the worse for me. I shan't be the first to get bitter payment for truth-telling. I changed. When I grew better my first wish and purpose was to tell you the real reason why I tried to do what I did. And then—oh, such

thousands of years stretched between me and the past, that I asked myself whether there was any need to go back so far."

"More need then than now, I should reckon."

"I suppose there was. But I came over cowardly about it, and—and—I got to feel I owed you such a lot——"

"Don't!" he cried out. "Damn it all—don't put it like that! Was I a man to claim any fancied debt? Did I ever dream to myself, or hint to you, or any living creature that you was under a debt to me? I saved your life—what was that? No more than a dog jumping in the water to drag a child ashore. 'Twas just a human instinct, and no more to my credit than to knock that rogue on the head was to my shame. You can't say I thought you owed me anything; you can't say I acted as if you owed me anything. Love you—yes—love you with every drop of blood in my veins—that I did do. But I never hinted, and I never thought that I had the right to expect you to love me. This is a black night's work for me, and I'm sick and angered about it. Say more—say more to me, Dru; I can't sleep on this."

"I want to say more," she declared. "I must say more. You interrupted me—natural enough you should. Can't you see *why* I kept my mouth shut against my conscience? O Johnny darling, there was a very good reason. I'm not clever at words, but you must take the will for the deed, and try and understand. I did owe you a lot, but I never grudged the debt, and I'd not have married you for gratitude—never. I wouldn't have done that wrong. But I got to know you so well, all those long months, and got to see what you were and—then—then I knew if I told you what I've told you to-night, Johnny, you'd have wanted me no more—and—and I began to want you by that time. I began slowly—half frightened—doubtful whether 'twas right or proper. I'd loved the other man. You know that. I'd loved him well, and he'd filled my life; but afterwards—he was gone. I swear to you that he seemed to belong to another life and another woman, for I never could feel—and I don't now—that her that tried to starve herself in Yarner was

me. It's all beyond any words of mine, but not beyond the nature of women. I was changed away from what I had been, and millions of years seemed to have passed between me and Timothy. And I wouldn't tell you, Johnny dearest, because if I had, you'd have felt you must stop living with me; and there was that in me half wanted you, then; and every hour from the time I promised to marry you I loved you hotter, and thanked God better that you loved me."

"'Tis damned difficult," he answered gloomily. "I'm puzzled for the minute. But what matters is that we are to each other as we are."

"And that's all that matters."

"Yes, it is. Come to think of it, you've put a weight on me and taken it off again. You loved me doubtfully and took me—half for love, half for payment. But then—then you got to know me better, and found how proper it was and how natural and seemly it was we should be together every way, and felt you wouldn't change for anything on earth. Be that right?"

"Dead true, and better said than I could say it," she answered. "You loved me grander than I loved you; but time's ahead of us, and I'll catch you up yet, and love you as grand as you deserve to be loved. I do it now—I do it now, for you're my life, and I hang on you for every joy and passion and delight, and waking every morning I wonder to think that such a man lives, and lives for me."

He embraced her, and rubbed his face against hers.

"That's all right, then," he said. "I don't see there's anything to make a fuss about. Come to think of it, there was no reason on earth why you should have told me how it was. If you didn't love him no more when you promised to marry me, I've got no reason to grumble."

"I didn't," she said.

"Then 'twas just damned bad luck for him. And, after all, if I took you away, I gave him something in exchange. A poor exchange, yet something to a man like him. And now he's got to be considered. I'm jealous for your credit in that quarter. I don't want

him or any other person to think that you jilted him for wantonness. I won't have that against you."

"What does it matter?"

"You ask that! But you're a woman and can't see like a man, of course. No, I won't have that against you. I've heard the truth, and Tim Snow's going to hear the truth; and you're going to tell him. You're going to that man to tell him the sacrifice you made for him, and why you gave him up, yet wouldn't explain. And, as to the reward you got for making that sacrifice—in the shape of the man who loved you as well as Snow did, and was made for you, and be yours for ever and ever—well, you can say as much or as little to the chap about me as you please. It shall be all above board and straight, anyhow; and I know you think the same."

Of course Drusilla had not thought of any such thing, but she did not say so. For a moment or two she was silent; then, realising that her husband expected an answer, she dissembled.

"You're right—as you always are," she said. "There's no reason why Timothy shouldn't know what happened. I owe that to you."

"You do," he answered, "though it don't matter a damn about me. You owe it to him before me, and to yourself as well. He shan't go on living and thinking ill of my wife. 'Tisn't fair to him or you. You must tell him how it all was for right and justice. I trust you to do it."

"So I will, then," she said, "and I'm the happier for having told you this. 'Twas the last cloud left in my sky."

CHAPTER VI

THE dead brake fern spread out from a little copse, and its amber oozed away like liquid into the heath and vanished there. But above the brown, there stood an ancient white-thorn ablaze with ripe fruit. Crimson and lustrous they spattered the branches and flamed against the lichen-clad twigs with radiance under the morning sun. Higher yet ascended a great fir, that flung her boughs out of the spinney-side and lifted a sun-soaked mass of glaucous blue against the paler azure of the sky. In the midst, where golden light found the heart of the tree, sat a wood-pigeon, like a jewel. It flashed, hurtling away at approach of man, and Timothy Snow stood under the harvest of the hawthorn and looked down upon Yarner.

He had been at home for a fortnight, and had worked hard during that time in the examination and adjustment of his uncle's affairs. Some subtlety was needed for his intercourse with business men upon this subject, because the law required the assumption that Lot Snow was not dead, while his nephew, knowing that he was, found himself again and again desirous to proceed upon the strength of that knowledge. He had, however, schooled himself to the outlook, and in practice it mattered little, since there was none to question his right to proceed as he pleased, and his aunt, Sibella Snow, gladly left all her interests in his hands.

He came now to Yarner without a special reason, and sat a while here, at the highest point of the forest, before continuing his way. He was merely taking exercise, and might have remained unobserved under the knoll in the heath for as long as he pleased. But like a wound in

the distant woods stood the grey tower of the mine, and its significance disturbed him and made him rise. He determined to descend to his old home, now inhabited by the Redstones, and call upon Drusilla. The time was come for doing so, and he felt equal to it. John would be from home, and it mattered nothing if he were not. Timothy had heard all the circumstances of Drusilla's marriage from his aunt—as she understood them—and now imagined that Sibella's delay, to which he first attributed his loss, was not really the cause of it. His transitory hope, that Lot Snow had separated them, and that time would bring them together again, perished when he heard that the woman was betrothed to another. He explained the tragedy differently now, and felt that since Drusilla had left him of her free will, because she found that another man suited her better, there was no more to be said, and he must face his loss, and face her with equal self-control. Now the ordeal came upon him suddenly, for at the confines of Yarner he met John and Drusilla walking together. The man he had spoken with already; the woman he had not yet met since his return home.

Redstone greeted Snow with friendship.

"Come to mark if I'm doing my work proper, I lay!" he said; "or else come to find if Kingdon and me be profiting by what you did yourself. My wife be very wishful to see you, Snow, and I'd like to think you was here to see her. I don't want no cloud from the past to hang over your future, nor yet mine and hers. But clouds will rise over life if we ban't quick to catch the first shadow, and blow 'em away afore 'tis too late."

"I was coming to see Drusilla," said the other. "I'm with you; there's nothing like taking a doubt by the throat and strangling it—if you're strong enough. You know me for a straight man, and no enemy to you now, whatever I may have been when I heard you had won your wife. But 'tis lucky, in a peculiar case like this, that you feel like that, and I hope she does the same."

"She does," said Redstone; "and she wants to speak to you, and I want her to. Then you can take us or leave us."

Drusilla had not spoken when she shook Timothy's hand, and she did not speak now but let her husband voice her.

To Snow the interview appeared altogether unreal. To find himself now beside Drusilla in Yarner was real enough ; but to hear another man, and that man her husband, speaking to him for her, created a sense of vision. The past, that had seemed so terrifically alive, receded behind a veil while he looked into the woman's face, and saw it much as his picture of it had always been. The flood of experiences that had swept over him seemed to grow thin ; he felt as though emerging from them back to light and air and reality once more. He felt as though the sound of her voice would restore life to its former levels, bring back yesterday, waken him from his dream.

"I'll go about my business, and leave you two to talk," said Redstone. "I've wanted this to happen, and should have planned it. But now it's planned itself, and if, come presently, you can find yourself in a mood to eat with us at home, where we live in your old house, then I hope you'll do so. And if 'twill hurt you to talk to her, I'm sorry," he added. "And if 'twill hurt her to talk to you, I'm sorrier still. But 'tis the right thing to leave no doubtful matters between you. There's that, for her own credit, I've axed Drusilla to tell you, Snow ; and you're too good and just a man to refuse to listen."

"I hope so," answered Timothy. "I should very much like to talk with you, Drusilla."

"So be it, then ; and if, as I say, you'll come and eat with us at noon, we shall both be glad of it," declared John. Then he shouldered his gun and went his way, and left the others alone together.

Drusilla's heart was beating painfully, and she found her tongue unsteady ; for this interview, albeit she knew that it had to take place, was now thrust so suddenly upon her that she found herself frightened and nervous. Even as Timothy had, she felt the familiar experience of being with him in Yarner as a scrap of reality looming through mighty unrealities, as a glimpse of clear sky through the welter of clouds ; but there was a vast difference between their

regard of this meeting ; because time had drawn her little barque of life into harbour ; she was content after the storms, and found herself daily a happier woman : while he had entered no harbour, and as yet his new significance and additions had not sufficed to take the place of the mightier experience that went before them. He was only conscious now that he had returned to the most precious thing the world had ever revealed to him, and when she spoke, Drusilla's voice liberated a myriad memories, came like the sudden rush of a stimulant upon a depressed mind, unsteadied his thinking and intoxicated his intellect. It was only by steadily keeping in view her action in leaving him, its deliberation of purpose and accomplishment of end in marriage with another man, that he found himself able to preserve self-control before her. Nevertheless she was there to explain these very things, and so unsettle the only conviction that enabled him to face her calmly.

They walked together, and he, perceiving her emotion, spoke first of himself and his affairs, his intentions and ambitions.

"I'm very glad to see you again, Drusilla," he said, "and I hope you'll let me call you that. I left you in passion because, you see, all that made life worth living for me was taken away when you took yourself away, and I couldn't lose it without a fight. You know my creed—how I've told you always we must fight for our own hand, and be a bit selfish, and keep our own point of view sharp, and not let rubbing too much against other people's points of view blunt it, and all that. So you know I had to fight, and you know that to a proud man like me 'tis bitter to lose—to lose anything, however small, if you think you're strong enough to hold it. And when I found I wasn't strong enough to hold you, I proved weak all round, and sank from my better self and raved and stormed like a lunatic and did many mad things. And for all that I'm sorry."

The calm, level flow of his voice with its unimpassioned cadence—a voice that had always seemed to her the indifferent spirit of Yarner's self—fell upon her listening ears and steadied her. But the things he said increased

her difficulties. She knew what John Redstone desired her to tell Timothy: it had to be done. But she temporised, and hoped that if they spoke together for a while longer an easier opportunity would arise.

"What are you going to do? For many things 'tis well that you should stand free before this new life," she said.

"I'll come to that. First I want to know you have forgiven and forgotten all that I spoke when we parted."

"All," she said. "And none can ever blame you for feeling as you did, and I least of all. And I never did and never shall."

"They tell me strange things about what happened to you. You wandered here all alone, like a babe in the wood, and might have died. But I thought——"

"Leave me for the present. Let's talk about you and what you're going to do. You'll have power, they tell me. And none better to have it than you—or like to use it wiser."

"Who can say? 'Tis easy to think, as often I did, what I'd do if I had power. Now I've got it the thing looks different. To begin with, there's such a lot of little mean needs go with it. A poor man's compensations are real enough, though they'll never grant them. Now I've got to see that people don't rob me, and I've got to make all sure, and I've got to be interested in politics, for my pocket's sake, and a lot of trash like that. And to work at keeping together what another man earned is mean, and I hate the thought; and to fatten on another's savings is mean too. I'll squander some to relieve my soul presently. My state's all chaos for the minute. How different it would have been if you'd found yourself able to stick to me! Then you'd——"

"List to me now," she said. "I'm going to tell you what I told my husband not long since, and he bade me tell you. He's very wishful to be your friend, for he thinks a lot of you and your wisdom; and when I told him how 'twas between us in the past, and why for I threw you over, nothing would do but that I told you also. Let me be bitter clear, Timothy. If I doubted myself I couldn't say what I'm going to, and I wouldn't come before you and

walk with you in this place. But the past is past for me, and I can't find words to say how far past. It's thousands of years in my count since I loved you and you loved me. And it was a good and beautiful thing. But I had to stop—there was no choice for me. I had to say I wouldn't wed you ; and then through very dark ways I went, and I suffered a great deal, and at last I came out of the shadow into light again."

"So long as you came out into the light. . . ."

"I did. I'm a happy woman now. 'Tis no slight on you to say it. I'm a happy wife, with far more happiness than I deserved or expected. But that's neither here nor there. I must go back now. My husband ordered it, and he said I owed it as much to you as to myself to let you know why it was that I changed my mind and wouldn't marry you."

"He ordered it—Redstone?"

"He did. He's a terrible fair man, with a great feeling for justice. He ordered me to tell you—to clear my character in your eyes."

"Tell me what you care to tell me—as much or as little, it's all one now. You're happy—that's what matters."

She explained fully and with extreme clarity the reasons that had made her break with Snow. She detailed the misery that followed, and confessed her purpose of self-destruction for love of him. The sequel she also described at length: her salvation in the ruin, her life at Dury, her sense of the abyss of time that stretched between. When she told him how she had accepted Redstone, he was moved to ask whether she had heard news of him from his aunt before the final step was taken ; but he felt that would not be a fair question, and did not put it. She made it clear that she had honestly ceased to love Timothy before she accepted John. She could give no explanation of the fact, but only related it. He asked her to pause there while he reflected.

"I can't understand that," he said, preserving a calmness equal to her own. "'Twould have been natural if my love for you had waned, since you threw me over without a cause ; and for a time it did wane. I'll be as frank as you.

For a time, since the only possible explanation in my mind was that you'd found a man you liked better, I loved you less. But then—just on the very eve of my going away—it came to my ears that Lot Snow had separated you from me. Yes, I heard what you've just told me—from my uncle himself. I was the last man he spoke with, so far as we knew, before he disappeared, and that is what he told me. Then huge hope woke, and I left directions with Aunt Sibella as to what she should do when you was found. Little I guessed—little I guessed how near I must have been to finding you myself! That's ended. You gradually got to love me no more. For why? That's the interesting thing. You loved me so well that you could give me up for the sake of my own good; and then, when all was changed and the way was clear and nothing on God's earth stood between us, you changed in earnest and took another."

"'Tis so—I can't say anything about it; it happened like that. I often thought of you, but I felt pretty sure I'd done what I meant to do and killed any love you might once have felt for me. How could it live over what I did? I heard nothing neither. No word came from you. I want to tell you another thing—for John's credit. He never knew all this till after we were married. If he'd known the reason why I'd thrown you over, he'd not have offered for me till I'd met you again and told you the truth. He said so himself when I did tell him."

"My God! What little things decide big ones. I see now how dead it was—your love for me. A word to him would have shut his mouth and left you free till I came home, but you didn't speak it."

"No. I was ill for a long time, and hated coming back to life. Then, very slowly, I began to find life worth living again. And 'twas John that made it so. 'Twas John that had done all and saved my life for me. I seemed to belong to him in a sort of way. I'd got to feel in debt and I'd got to care for him a lot, too—I won't deny that. I didn't want to marry him particularly, but there was no other way of showing him how I valued him and his goodness. And I did marry him—willingly—happily. And now I've got to love the ground he walks

on, to believe that him and me were planned for each other ; because not a living man—not you, Timothy—could have been to my wretched, feeble character just what he is. You mustn't think this cruel, or if so, then try to see 'tis kind cruelty. For John's right when he said it was better far to have everything clear and straight among us three."

He nodded. Her voice was good to him. Her inflections, pauses, and her trick of saying a few words very slowly and then fluttering to the end of a sentence in a breath—these things, and the leaf falling around them and the vision of Yarnier, awoke in him a sense of return into the past. But for the words she spoke they might be following the tenor of past life as they had planned it. In spring they had often spoken of autumn, and she had told him how fair and fine the forest spread when the golden days returned.

His heart hungered for her under his level speech, and she, who had listened and felt satisfied by his tones that all was going to be smooth, grew startled when she looked into his face presently ; because his eyes spoke another language than his tongue, and she, who knew what hunger was, saw the light of it flickering there.

She told him everything, except the murder of his uncle, and he told her everything save his own panic deeds on discovery of the murder.

She left him impressed with the fact that she was very happy—as happy as ever she had been in their love time ; and he perceived that whatever were her feelings when she accepted Redstone, the result had been absolutely successful and led to joy. She was exceedingly explicit, and he noticed that a certain subtlety proper to her old self was not apparent now. A charm of tender thought and gentle imagination lacked from her speech, and he supposed, either that intercourse with the practical Redstone had quenched it, or that it was an ephemeral beauty of soul awakened by her love for him and perished with that love.

He went away from her with much to think upon. Great moral questions arose before him, but he evaded them for one more interesting. He asked himself if this

woman could ever love him again—if nature could so work with her that an emotion, apparently dead beyond recall, might be raised from the dead. He argued that it might, because his own love for her had by no means perished. It had languished, as he had told her, but it had never expired, even at news of her marriage; and now that he knew what had in reality separated them, now that he learned that his dead uncle's words were true, he perceived the size of Drusilla's self-denial in the past and could not choose but love her.

Anon he thought himself into a frame of mind uninfluenced by any values other than those of current morality. What she had done for him—renounced him at mighty personal cost for his own good—that he must now do for her. She had been handsomely rewarded, and had passed beyond his reach for ever: he recognised the fact. But there remained evidence of deterioration in his temper, and the old, strong rationalism of a year before was weakened.

He could find it in him bitterly to curse the dead man; he could find it in him heartily to long that his hand indeed had slain Lot Snow.

For her part the woman was more moved by this lengthy interview than she permitted to appear, and as she had stolen back in flashes and side-lights to the imagination of Timothy and built herself back into the old memory he entertained of her, so he had reasserted himself in her mind as the resolute, dominant creature of old. But whereas she stood alone in his regard, with none to whom she might be compared, in her case there was sufficient foil, and, seen against her husband, her old lover came short in many particulars. She was able, of course, from the standpoint of a wife to survey Timothy in countless new relations. She admired him and esteemed him still; but to her present attitude of mind the difference between Snow and Redstone was the difference between a light-house and a great wood fire. Her own estimates remained assured, but she wondered what Redstone would think of Snow and what Snow would think of her husband, when they came to be better acquainted. She foresaw no

complications, and trusted that the men would be friends. It is true that there had died in her a certain element of maiden romance that had touched her days when, like a nymph without a faun, she had haunted the woodlands ; but she was a wife now—happy, content, and deeply imbued with her husband's opinions and attitude to responsibility. She had become more practical, less emotional, more affirmed and staid. Already she could look back with bewildered wonder at her sentimental madness, when, from force of grief, she had laid hands on her own life. The ugly dream had receded into a past inconceivably remote, and she could not conceive of any circumstances arising which might shatter anew her strength or lay waste that stout edifice of common-sense, courage, and self-possession whose foundations were laid in happy wifehood.

CHAPTER VII

HIS meeting with Drusilla had been widely different from the imagined thing, and Timothy Snow reflected, not without some hollow echo of laughter in his soul, at the picture he had made of that meeting, limned through many a restless night, and the reality. There was nothing to say. He did not even exonerate himself to her, or show how his aunt's disorder prevented her from communicating with Drusilla before it was too late. He accepted the situation gradually, but still told himself, as a salve to his own opinions, that had he found the woman not happy, he would have endeavoured to draw her from her husband to himself. She was, however, happy—probably happier than she could ever have been with any other. Accident had played fair with Redstone and foul with Snow. The whole concatenation had turned on chance, and chance favoured the other man. There was, moreover, one fact that consoled Timothy. He remembered how easy it is for humanity to cry sour grapes upon occasion; but he believed that he committed no such fatuity when telling himself in cold blood that Drusilla had sunk mentally from her maiden standpoint. He would have kept her on a higher plane than Redstone could; and the fact that she had so easily and happily sunk to a lower one comforted Snow in his loss.

He was interested anon to meet with John Redstone, and here another revelation awaited him. He had formed a mental picture of Redstone built on his slight acquaintance, and elaborated after he heard that Drusilla meant to marry him. Now they met and talked together, and Redstone revealed a vigour of character unsuspected by the other.

Much occupied Snow's days, and many of his theories

and opinions suffered modification before the profound change in his fortunes. Life was altered, and he learnt that money, if not a power in the sense that he had regarded power, was none the less an ample equivalent. Since the world treated money as power, bowed down to it, and worshipped it as supreme power, then, spurious though it might be on his private estimate, for practical purposes it fulfilled the tests. When that happens to alter a man's environment and enhance his significance in human eyes, it is impossible for him to continue unconscious of the fact, or conduct himself as formerly. Snow felt uneasy at first and contemptuous of the people. He told himself that though they might change, he never could. Then he began to grow accustomed to the implicit acknowledgment, and he began to overlook a little the sources from which it sprang. It was left for a conversation with Redstone to restore the balance and steady his perspective.

Snow saw no more of Drusilla for some weeks ; but John he met by appointment, and together they rode to Dury Farm, that Timothy might see old Mr Jacob Redstone and question him concerning facts relative to the past, when his son lived.

They met at Bag Tor, above Ilsington, and trotted through fair weather to the distant farm.

Snow was silent at first, for he had much on his mind ; but the other interested him presently, and they spoke very openly together.

"I hope and trust," said John, "that so far as you and me be concerned the future's clear. You know what there is to know, and I'd like for you to say you bear no ill-will against anybody. 'Tis just the falling out of things, and seemingly another example of the old saw that unlucky in love, lucky in life."

"That's so. I didn't think there were such plain-speaking people in the world as you and Drusilla. She wasn't so definite once, but you've made her. In this case it was the right and proper way, of course."

"I hate for things to be doubtful and uncertain. I wanted you to know that none had been mean or unsporting or anything like that."

"All is clear."

"So much the better. There's little enough I care a damn about, and few enough I care a damn about; but where I think a lot of a man, same as I think of you, I don't want to be undervalued or not understood. I'm simple and ignorant, but so are most people. You're different. You're a very clever man, and it would be a great thing for such as me to know you and have the luck to listen to you now and then."

"You know yourself, seemingly."

"Pretty well, but I can surprise myself still. Now I lay you couldn't do that?"

"Life surprises me. I always wanted to escape responsibility for the sake of getting real power; but now responsibility is thrust upon me—and all it means."

"A teaching thing, no doubt—to find yourself somebody to other people, and yet to know you're still the same man to yourself. Now you'll have to set an example and all that rot, I suppose?"

"I've always tried to live up to my convictions."

"And always succeeded, no doubt. But maybe they'll be shook a bit now. Money's money, and I'd be the last to flout it. Morals may be a very good stick to beat a dog; but money's better than morals, by just so much as a sovereign's better'n a sermon all the world over. You've got power now—you're lifted up to be a fifty horse power machine where your high character alone did just the other thing: it pulled you down and stood in your way."

"You're mean to think like that," said Snow.

"I don't say it's right or wrong; I only say it's so," answered the other. "You know how people look at you now; you know how many touch their hats who naturally didn't when you was doing gamekeeper's work; and you know if people ever touch their hats to goodness and high moral opinions. I don't, anyway. I touch it to power—nought else. 'Tisn't the high morals that you may have that drew me after you. 'Twas the feeling that you were a lot stronger than most chaps—strong enough to flout the herd of us and go your own way, like the hawks and foxes. And now your strength be doubled and trebled, for gold's

the strongest metal, and saves a man an awful lot of trouble if he's got it. It will help you to be harder than ever you were; and 'twill larn you a lot worth knowing about your fellow-man; and 'tis a weapon of might against your enemies, if you've got any. I'd sooner have it than anything in the world—except what I've gotten. Why, 'tis like keeping an army of soldiers to fight your battles for you—an army of yellow boys—a conquering army, too, for there's hardly anything that men and women want and seek nowadays but money can get it. I dare say that's a shameful thing, but it's a true thing. You can make what terms you please with life now, because the world always gives in to money—from its kings to its tinkers."

"'Twas a cleaner place, however, when money didn't count for everything."

"That was when the right arm held its own. Well, you was a man of your hands in your time, and now you'll be a man of your head; and brains and money together conquer the earth. Afore, you had to follow your own ideas and keep your mouth shut—eh? You practised your own opinions but dared not preach 'em."

"Yes," admitted Snow, "that's true, and money alters that. Before, I was cunning as a serpent, but took good care not to hiss for fear of frightening people and getting a crack on the head I didn't deserve. Now I fear nothing of that sort. What's dangerous talk in a gamekeeper is wisdom to be reckoned with in a man with money and land, and power to employ labour. I thought I knew how mean-minded and small and trashy most people were already; but you must come into a bit of cash to understand how low they'll sink."

"Don't you get bitter against your fellow-creatures, however. It ban't their fault. You can't be honest and live in a crowd nowadays, and you can't live far out of a crowd if you're so poor as most of us. We've got to herd to keep warm; we've got to herd to keep food in the pot. And since the upper people all put money first and fight for it, and trample the under people to prevent 'em from getting too much of it, then you can't blame the poor for cringing

to you. 'Tis the only way they've got of showing you they know you are above 'em, and may henceforth carry their food in your hand. Some must get good out of you, and none can say who may not, so all cringe. 'Tis the possibility about every rich man that makes the world bend the knee to him. Mark me, they'll all do it. I know but one who won't, because he can't. He's never larned the trick, for all his great age; and that's him you be going to see now—my grandfather."

"If the people knew me, however, they'd know 'twas just going the wrong way to work."

Redstone laughed.

"You think so now, but wait a bit. Money's a taste that rides rough shod over a man terrible quick. I've heard a lot about it from my old grandfather, and he's shown me how it speeds through a man's senses, and changes his outlook in no time, like strong drink do."

"Nought can change character. Nature arms us against such a thing."

"'Tisn't to change character—'tis to give character a chance. You'll see presently, and you'll find the poor that bow their backs to you, know best what you want—better than you know yourself. You want 'em to bend, though you think you don't; and the man who passed you by, same as he did when you carried a gun under your arm and bred pheasants—that man would find he'd made a mistake if you got the chance to show him he had."

"What a poor creature you must think me," said Snow calmly.

"Not I. I think a terrible lot of you; your little finger knows more than my head; but if you fancy you'll never come to feel like other rich men and to trust money, like them who have to trust it, then you're wrong. That's not contrary to nature—'tis a certainty."

"Money can't alter the way I value things."

"But it can alter the way you've valued, and that alters the way you value things, say what you will. Haven't a shilling sunk to be worth less to your mind than sixpence used to be? And the same with all else. You're like a child with a jack-in-the-box. 'Tis nought till you open the

lid—then you'll see. You don't know what money can do yet: you only guess. Would you part from it this minute for the old peace of mind and lack of responsibility? No, you're not such a fool. You'll find power be better than peace—more exciting and interesting—more in keeping for a strong man like you, with brains in his head."

"There's Nature," said Snow. "Nature's been my guide always, and I've never trusted her in vain. I've got to reconcile this accidental power with her rules. I've got to see how to plan my life. Earthquakes have happened in it. Things have been given and things have been taken away. It wants a steady man to stand four-square to the situation I find myself in."

Redstone did not answer this, and when Timothy spoke again it was on the subject of Dury. He had made it clear that he would not pursue the policy of his uncle, and the lawyers felt no reason to insist on that course. . . . They arrived at the farm presently, and partook of a meal of bread and cheese and beer that old Jacob had prepared for them.

He was cheerful and humorous as ever, and greeted Timothy as Redstone had foretold.

"Ah, Mr Snow, you be the monkey that have seen the world—and how do 'e find it?"

"I find it terrible big, Jacob, yet not big enough," said the visitor. "There's too much sea, in my opinion—cruel waste those thousands of miles of salt water."

"Don't you say that. The World-maker's got chapter and verse for all He does, depend on it. If there was no sea, what would the fishes do, and where would this here river Dart go to? The sea have kept humans off one another's throats time and again, and given 'em a chance to still their angry passions. The sea have taught men patience. And Him as made it can unmake it if He sees fit. He could draw it off, Timothy Snow, if more land was called for, like you blot up ink with paper. But 'tis the meek will inherit the earth, and there's more than enough for that little company. As for England, she's bit off more than she can chew as 'tis. 'Tis a pitiful thing to see her nowadays, cackling like a frightened fowl over her eggs."

Here at least were two men who doffed no hat to Timothy. Though he held power over them and might have made them suffer in the most serious particulars, they displayed neither respect nor ceremony.

They laughed and jested with him, and hesitated not to differ from him. Jacob openly doubted the wisdom of putting trust in Nature, and prophesied a harsh awakening for Timothy if he did so; while John Redstone was more of the younger man's mind in that particular, and flouted his grandfather's trust in God.

"If you be going to try to set the world right, you do it your own way and not grandfather's," advised John; but Snow denied any such ambition.

"I'm going to try and set myself right," he said. "Here's a chance that falls to few. I've got a brain, and now I'm going to set to work to see what 'tis good for."

"Don't you punish it too hard," said old Jacob. "'Tis an open-air brain, and you've won your wittiness from the open air on your own showing. I shouldn't go reading a pack of books, if I was you. You give the Bible a chance, young man. 'Tis a very remarkable thing about the Word, in my opinion, that the more you delve in it, the better the crop, and the less you want to go to any other book."

They spoke of happiness.

"Some folk fight the world, and some turn their backs on the world and fight themselves, and find that all the fighting they want," said Snow. "Happiness is to be got out of fighting no doubt, and 'tis the right sort of happiness for a brave man."

"Things like fighting don't bring it, however," declared Jacob. "Happiness don't depend on what you think, nor yet upon what you do: you'll find that out long afore you get up as old as me. It don't depend on fighting, or lying low, or upon your health, or sickness, or upon wealth or poverty, or upon the measure of your sense, or upon the nature of your luck. 'Tis just a gift, like blue eyes, or a good temper; and life can't make you an unhappy man if the Lord's decided you are to be a happy one."

"The less wit the more happiness, I believe," said his grandson; but Jacob questioned this.

"I've known very great fools to be very miserable men," he said, "and I've seen very clever men pretty cheerful when the wind blew warm."

"If you look round about in a thinking spirit you can't be happy," asserted Snow.

"No doubt that's why I be, then," answered John Redstone. "I'm happy as a lark, just because I don't look round about. But you can't say that neither, because I do. No, the reason's different. I'm happy because I wasn't born to set nothing right; and what can't be altered won't never trouble me. If you can do any good, then do it; if you can't, then keep your nerve about it and don't yelp."

The trend of the talk and the point of view of these men interested Timothy a great deal, but it was the younger that attracted him most, because, like himself, Redstone had thrown over revealed religion. It seemed indeed in some particulars that Redstone was ahead of Timothy. He struck Snow as a man who would not divide theory and practice. His good faith seemed impossible to question. He found himself doubting his former opinion: that Drusilla had made a mental change for the worse when she left him for her husband. Redstone was strong, and not sicklied by too much thinking. He played for his own hand, rejoiced in his luck, fed richly at the table of life while he might, and looked neither behind nor ahead. Snow envied him his power of abstraction and simplification; but Jacob explained it when they spoke apart.

"'Tis the woman he's hungered and hankered for. He's her god. And for the creature to be god to another creature is the highest we can reach to—though dangerous, no doubt. We can't feel more like god than when we're reigning in a human heart. Life's a very good and blessed thing to him. He's that single-minded you see. I hope you'll come to the same great, natural joys, young man. In my case 'twasn't quite like that, because I wasn't god to my missis: she was god to me. A wise creature, with judgment that would have been surprising in a male.

She was very happy along with me, but never blind to her own more lofty nature. She never mentioned it, you know—too nice for that. But there 'twas, and only the great sense that I'd gleaned from her kept me from going silly when she was called away." Then he spoke of the visitor. "You're one of the lucky ones, you are. You've been poor, and now you be rich. Money can never blind you, like it does them that are born to it. But where poverty dulled your sight, money may brighten it now."

"I mean to do something in the world, however—not to stand and look on," said Snow.

"Who don't?" answered the old man. "But you'll do well to take a good look first. Don't dash at it: go back for your spring."

Snow learned what he had come to learn, undertook to let the Redstones redeem Dury as easily as it might be done, and rode back to Ilington in the evening with John.

Their talk fell on Lot Snow, and they argued upon his nature, and why all men had disliked him and mistrusted him. Redstone was confident that Lot must be dead, and Timothy declared that he believed the like. He speculated on what accident had ended his uncle's career, and the other, indifferent to the wisdom or folly of opening the subject, argued in opposition.

"If you ax me," John declared, "I believe the old bird was knocked on the head. There's a score of men who must have itched to do it. You say yourself, when you come to look into his affairs that you found that he devoured widow's houses and all that. Take me—I might have done it; take you—you might have done it. If his murderer turned up to-morrow, there's not a living man would particular want to punish him. No doubt the Law would do so, but human nature's just in the long run, and if a deed does good to the larger number at the expense of the few, few will cry out against it."

"There's the Law, however, as you say," replied Timothy; "murder's murder, and the Law hangs for it."

"Then be hanged to the Law afore it finds him. We'll wish the chap luck, whoever 'twas," answered John.

They parted presently, and Snow returned to his aunt and

his mother at Ilsington, while Redstone met Drusilla, where she had promised to meet him, on the way home above the heights of Yarner.

The matter swiftly vanished out of John's mind, but from Snow's it did not so quickly depart. For the first time a suspicion of the truth overtook him. He perceived that Redstone might have murdered Lot Snow, and noted, what was more significant, that he was just the man to have done such a deed in hot blood and not repented it in cold. The subject fascinated him, and the possibility awoke a sort of respect from Redstone rather than any aversion from him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE subtle changes in human relations that influence action now led Frederick Moyle to the supreme event of his life. He found himself on the horns of a dilemma, and we see him at last by night solving his great uncertainties.

It happened that another—Audrey Leaman—was faced at the same time with a crisis in her fortunes, and through the brief days of doubt she chose the companionship of Moyle. He was an old friend, he cared deeply for her, and she was almost minded to take him into her confidence. But she did not, and he, mistaking the motives of her amity, felt great hope awaken. He believed that she began to find him essential; indeed, she had assured him sometimes that he was her best friend and most faithful companion. Audrey had met Timothy Snow and his mother; and she had told Moyle that Timothy was changed. Her own attitude toward him she did not dwell upon, but Frederick guessed that it was not unfriendly. He supposed, therefore, that the secret of which Audrey hinted must be concerned with his old enemy.

For a time his mind hung balanced between the man and the woman. Love for one and hatred of the other kept him in equilibrium; but upon Audrey's apparent increase of regard, there awoke an inspiration, and Moyle was now writing a letter that must precipitate the event.

He believed that the girl stood in doubt between him and Snow; he suspected that she cared more for him, but that Timothy's possessions and the pressure of her parents might be tempting her towards his enemy. He felt that, with his private knowledge, the game was in his hands; and he believed that her interest in Snow was probably

just sufficient to make Audrey do the thing he desired. She could not marry Snow, but he would make it possible for her to save him. Such a course must lose Moyle his revenge, but he would be recompensed by winning Audrey for a wife. Moreover, the sweetest part of vengeance in no case would be denied, for Snow should privately hear of his discovery and go haunted with terror to the grave.

Long reflections brought him to a conclusion, and his master-stroke took the shape of a letter to Audrey Leaman. Little considering the awful burden he was suddenly thrusting upon shoulders so ill fitted to sustain it, he told her what he believed to be the truth in brief, blunt terms, and faced her with the tremendous alternative of saving Snow by marrying the writer, or sacrificing Snow by refusal.

The letter was modified and re-copied thrice before Frederick felt satisfied that it conveyed his exact meaning.

"MY DEAREST AUDREY,—You have long known that I love you better and truer than any man you ever met, and you have told me yourself that I wore better than any of the others. And that is true, for after years and years I have got to know you so well that you seem the best part of my life. I understand you inside out, and I know, as well as I know anything on God's earth, that I am the man, and the only man, for your husband. I'm easy going and fond of pleasure and life and happiness, and I'd never harry or bully you, but always think of your fun and joy, and be ready to fall in with your wishes and opinions about things in general.

"Yes, I wear well, dear Audrey, but I'm human and I don't want to wear out—that is, with waiting. And, in a word, I'm not going to wait no more.

"I have hinted dark and terrible things to you lately, and the time has come for hinting no more but talking plain.

"You've got to decide about your life now—right away, and I'm sorry to put you in rather a fix over it; but I should be too sporting to do so if I didn't know at the bottom of my heart, by many signs and tokens, it won't take you long or try you very much to make up your mind. Because I know you love me, Audrey dearest. You have shown me you do by a thousand little signs, and you have told me you never feel so easy and comfortable as you do along with me. And I worship you, and know very well what you want, and that I shall be just the exact man for you in every sort

of way. For never did a couple think alike and take the same view of everything like what we do.

"And now, Audrey, I must tell you the terrible truth. I know you feel kindly to Timothy Snow, and -would be very sorry for any trouble to overtake him; but there's worse than trouble in the air for him. In fact, there's death waiting for him, and I'm going to speak out now and tell you all about it.

"On the day his Uncle Lot disappeared, Timothy Snow met me on Hey Tor Down and asked me if I had seen the old man. I had seen him, and told Timothy which way he had gone. You know what happened after. Lot Snow vanished, and Timothy Snow went to foreign parts. There was hue and cry, and presently you found Lot's hat and very wisely brought it to me. I put you off when you asked me if I'd found anything, because I felt that it was not the time to speak. But I did find something, and that something was the dead body of old Snow in a pit hid up with leaves. And I put more leaves and brushwood on the carcase, so that none else should find it.

"Now you understand how it is. This man, Timothy Snow, killed his uncle in Yarner by the old mine and hid him there. He is in my hand, and I give his life up to you. But there's a condition attaching to it which you will very easily guess.

"Mind you, Audrey, I would not make the condition, or come to you with this tale at all, if I did not feel sure I was only hastening you to do what you want to do already. I'm not the cruel or brutal sort, who hold a pistol to a girl's head or anything of that. I do honestly believe you love me better than anybody in the world, and well I know how much I love you. But, as Snow have been pretty well known to you and you feel kindly to him, I'm making assurance doubly sure for myself by telling you the dreadful thing that he's done. All's fair in love and war, you know, Audrey darling, and so I've got to say this to you: that you must do a good turn to two men at once, and you must marry me and save Timothy.

"You know very well what a cruel grudge I've got against him, and what a blackguard way he treated me; but that is all past, and it does not weigh with me at all. I am quite impartial about it, but I have certainly done a brilliant stroke in my business, and made a discovery that will get me high promotion, and very likely get me taken on right away at Scotland Yard and put in the detective service. And you will see in a minute that it can't be a small thing to make me deny myself all that advantage.

"But you are not a small thing. You are everything in the world to me, and I would rather stop on in Islington as a common constable with you for a wife than be head of the service without you.

"So there it stands, and I feel pretty sure you will come to me and save Snow. And God knows you will never regret it for an hour if you do so.

"I cannot wait, for time presses, and I must ask you to meet me to-morrow night. I am sorry to make the time so short, but I must. And I say again I know pretty well what you will feel, and so it won't take you very long to make up your mind.

"I must warn you too, Audrey, that you can't save Snow except by marrying me; because I shall take steps, after sending you this letter, to see that you do not communicate with him even if you wanted to. I have planned it all as only a policeman can do such things.

"So I ask you to meet me to-morrow by the old tram line in Yarners—where it runs above the mine. You know the place. We've been there often enough together. I'll get there before dusk and see you home after. And I shall be terrible firm, dear Audrey, because it's life or death to me, as well as to the other man. I must be terrible firm, and warn you that nothing on God's earth must stop you from coming. I'll take no denial because, as I tell you, my whole life hangs upon it. You must come, and not anything on God's earth must prevent you from coming. And if you don't come, you'll be putting a rope round Timothy's neck just as sure as if you was the hangman. If you don't come by half after five, Audrey, I shall go straight and apply for the warrant. You'll have no chance afterwards to change your mind, because once I get the warrant out, all else must follow in due course, and there's no earthly power to prevent it or save the murderer.

"You'll hang Timothy Snow if you don't come—be positive certain of that. For it was a very dirty murder, and planned careful and hidden careful. He's done for if I move a finger.

"I tell you again, Audrey dearest, that I wouldn't put you in the tight place of having to decide over this if I didn't feel sure in my heart it won't be difficult to do.

"I'm a very honourable man, and wouldn't talk of blackmail or any beastly thing like that; but life's life and luck's luck, and I can't throw away the chance of a lifetime now it has come. I must have fame, or I must have you. And you are better than all the fame in the world.

"So there it is, and I leave it at that, and I know you'll

be by the old tram line by five o'clock or near it. I don't think I can make my meaning clearer, and you will quite understand there must be no second thoughts this time.

"Snow's life was in my hand and I've put it into yours, and to-morrow you've got to tell me whether he is to live or die. Remember you cannot help him against me, because it is impossible for him to escape me now. He's watched every hour.

"It sounds a bit brutal put like this, but I can't put it no other way, and, after all, you love me best, and I know it, and that's everything.—Your faithful lover, FRED."

Mr Moyle took this letter to the little post-office of Ilsington an hour after midnight, and he knew that Audrey must get it on the morning of that day.

CHAPTER IX

TORRENTIAL rains had beaten since noon upon the earth, and persisted until evening. Then the sky paled a little in the eye of the wind, and the grey wore threadbare into patches of light, as Frederick Moyle walked over the skirts of the Moor to Yarner. From under lifting fog-banks the soaking heath crept out starkly round him in the clearness after rain. Grey lumbering cumuli still hid the peaks of the land, but there was broken light in them, and each newborn pool, each rivulet flashing over green grass, stared or glittered from the darkness of the water-logged waste. The ferns' dry russet had turned to an auburn that was full of sulky purple; the sponges of the peat were overflowing; even the shelves and ledges of the rocks dripped a steady rain upon the pitted earth beneath them, and the clear, washed air was full of the murmur of water.

Frederick passed to his vital tryst through gathering twilight, for evening appeared to hasten, and it was gloomy before he reached the old tram line and began to pace thereon. But the fog rose and swept away for a season, and on the arch and verge of the immense hill that swung westerly above him there gleamed a pale, green light and hung a star.

Audrey delayed, and, though he stopped often to listen for her footfall, no sounds but the forest sounds reached him. Very black against the dim face of the woods ascended the chimney of the old mine, and night already brooded upon it.

The watcher reflected that in the space of thirty minutes would be decided the mighty question of his life. He imagined Lot Snow's dust hidden in the gloom beneath,

waiting and listening to know whether fate was to reveal the truth at dawn of another day, or conceal it perhaps for ever.

Into the pallid sky rolled presently a moon short of full. Like a great, ripe fruit she hung low over the ragged rim of the forest and paled from red gold to silver as she rose. The last blackbird had cried, and the woods were profoundly still. Only the pines uttered a fitful sighing. Then the gibbous planet, sailing high, rained down light upon the wet earth, so that the grass, all pearl-coloured with moisture, glittered between the shadows, and the nearly naked boughs of the trees flashed, where countless liquid diamonds were strung upon their network of darkness.

Audrey Leaman gave no sign, and as the minutes passed, anger kept the watcher warm. For half an hour beyond the limit of appointed time he waited, then he broke from his measured tramp, stood one moment, expired a great gust of air from his lungs and with it banished the first ambition of his life for ever. The salt of existence would not be found in a woman's arms. She was obdurate, and cared nothing, it seemed, for the one man or the other.

He turned to the future and suffered the spectacle of his own approaching significance to dwarf his disappointment.

He left Yarner, and proceeded at once with the steps necessary to the arrest of Timothy Snow. He had made it clear in his letter to Audrey that, whatever might be her wish, her will was powerless to assist Timothy since he would be under a pair of secret eyes from the moment she received the letter. It was not true, but he knew that Audrey would believe it. He found time to wonder how she could have done this cold-blooded thing.

Before ten o'clock Moyle called with other police at the house by the lich-gate to arrest Snow. An inspector was spokesman, and the other officers kept behind him. Timothy's mother came to the door, and the policeman asked whether her son was at home. She answered that he had gone to 'The Coach and Horses,' to meet a house-agent by appointment. Whereupon he left immediately and proceeded to the inn.

CHAPTER X

UPON this night—one destined to be historical in the brief annals of Ilsington—old Jacob Redstone and his grandson called at 'The Coach and Horses.' Jacob was come from Dury to spend a day or two with Drusilla and John at Yarner; he had been among old friends during the afternoon, and he sat now in the public bar with John beside him. Thomas Turtle, the carrier, was also there, and Saul Butt, the woodman. But it was Seth Champion from Middlecot who brought the news. He came to see Jacob, and then announced a mystery.

"A proper come-along-of-it, souls! My people be tearing their hair out, you might almost say, for our girl—Miss Audrey—she's gone—clean gone! A fly-by-night sort of thing, seemingly, for she weren't in the house when we roused this morning, and she never unrayed last night, they say. Her bed wasn't slept in nor nothing. And her gert dog, by the name of 'Battle,' be yowling for her something cruel."

They bade him give the details in order, and by dint of cross-questioning learned the facts.

"Us have kept it quiet all day for fear of scandal, and for hope she'd come back any minute; but it can't be kept quiet no more, and there'll be search to-morrow if nought's heard in the morning. I doubt she's all right, because she's the sort that knows mighty well how to take care of herself, but of course her mother thinks she's come to grief. You see, as I said to Mr Leaman, 'tisn't as if her had gone out for a walk, or what not, and never come back—then you might have thought that trouble had overtook her. But she slips away after us all be asleep. She goes to some-

body without a doubt—a man, for sartain. So I tell 'em to possess their souls in patience and wait to hear the news and hope for the best.”

John Redstone spoke.

“I’ll lay my life she’s all right,” he said. “She’s as sensible as she’s fine. She won’t give herself away. She was always for mysteries and plots and all that. Perhaps Timothy Snow knows a bit about it.”

“No, he don’t, because I met him an hour ago and asked him. If she’d took a fancy there, or if he’d liked her, there wouldn’t have been no occasion for all these May games.”

“She must be off to get a bit of joy,” declared Ned Blackaller from behind the bar. “She’s one of them high-spirited creatures brimming with health and hankering for a pinch of salt in her life. She’ll turn up again after her adventure, very like—none the worse, we’ll hope.”

“She’s the sort to marry in secret to make it better fun,” said John Redstone. “I’ve often wondered how she could stick this place—she’s too free and large-minded to bide here.”

“Perchance some other body have told her so,” suggested the carrier. “Them flighty girls be very ready to lend a ear to the tempter. There’s a danger when such good looks as hers be linked to a light nature. She may yet bring her mother’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

“Not her,” answered John. “She’s wideawake and full of cleverness. She’ll astonish you all some day, and very like that day’s to-morrow. Maybe the next thing you hear will be the wonderfulest news that you old blades ever did hear.”

“You talk as if you knowed something?”

Mr Blackaller spoke, but Redstone only shook his head and laughed.

“I may, or I may not; but I know her, and I know she’s all right, and you can tell her mother that much, so that she may sleep in peace.”

They clamoured to learn more, but John refused to speak further; indeed, he denied any exact knowledge. Then they criticised Audrey, and some, including Thomas Turtle, spoke harshly of her nature. Redstone and his

grandfather took her part. Talk finally drifted from Willes Leaman's daughter to the general question of the duty of the child and the Fifth Commandment of the decalogue.

"There's no honour now—not between the young and their parents. They don't honour their fathers and mothers no more, and so their days won't be long in the land," declared Mr Turtle. "You'll bear me out, Jacob Redstone, that when we was young, we thought a lot more of the grown-up folk than the rising generation do."

"I grant it," said Jacob. "The young look to the young now for their wisdom and pleasure and all. Times be changed, and I'm afeard that the Ten Commandments don't strike fear to the soul like they did when Moses fetched 'em down flame-new from the Mount."

"They'm played out," said the woodman.

"I wouldn't say that," answered Blackaller. "They ban't played out ezacally, but they be taken in an easier spirit — some of 'em. There's a great vartue in the Commandments still, for they are like these here new ships built in compartments: you can break one now and again without sinking. And law and order being fetched up to such a pitch, as they are nowadays, there's only a very few of 'em we be tempted to break."

"For my part," declared old Redstone, "there's only two or three at most as ever I was tempted to break, even in my young and fiery days."

John laughed.

"Well done you, grandfather!" he said.

"And which might they be, Jacob?" enquired Seth Campion. "'Twould be a very interesting item to know which of 'em you scatted."

Timothy Snow entered the bar at this moment and asked for a stranger. His advent silenced conversation, then, since none had yet come for him, he asked what they had been discussing.

"The Ten Commandments," answered John; "and my old man was just going to tell us which he'd broke in his youth—wasn't you, grandfather?"

"No, I wasn't," answered Jacob. "I ban't going to tell

none of my secrets to you rash, chattering chaps. All I'll say is, they wasn't what I call policeman commandments."

"Why, you can smash all of 'em, if you'm clever enough," declared Saul Butt.

"But in some cases you'll have to suffer in this world if you'm catched out doing so; and they be the policeman commandments," explained Jacob.

"T'others have no law to back 'em," said Butt, "and they be broken every day—by me and everybody."

"Which do you break daily, then?" asked Turtle.

"Which I break and which I don't be my business," replied the woodman, "and no more to be told than the money I earn or any other private item."

"Which you break be the Lord's business, as you'll find some day," answered Turtle. "He made the Commandments, and they'm so good now as ever they was, like all His works, and we can't say which be worst to break in the Lord's eye. And when it comes to the Last Day, you'll find they'm all 'policeman commandments,' as Jacob calls 'em."

"You think 'twill be as bad not to honour your father and mother as to commit murder—eh, Thomas?" asked Timothy Snow.

"I don't know," answered Turtle. "It may be. We can't read the mind of the Lord. 'Tis very like, for instance, seeing the store He've always set on His own Day, that it may be just so bad to make it a holiday as we do now, as it is to take what don't belong to us. They be a sharp challenge to human nature or they wouldn't be broke so oft. I lay there's not a man in this bar haven't broke one or other."

"And not a man in this bar God haven't forgiven for doing so," said Jacob. "We don't dwell enough upon that, in my opinion. 'Tis a great luxury to forgive them that wrong you, and that's about the only real piece of fun our Maker hath. No doubt He be planning many a surprise for us worms, when we come wriggling up out of the earth into the light of His countenance."

"He surprises us in this world quite enough—them that believe in Him. We don't want any more of His surprises, surely?" said Snow.

"Suppose the people went about saying they didn't believe in you, Timothy Snow," argued Jacob Redstone.

"That's a very different thing," answered his grandson. "Here's a man staring us in the face. We must believe in him."

"And don't God stare everybody in the face?" asked Jacob. "Wouldn't the sparrow fall to the ground if He forgot the way of its little wings? If God misremembered the world for one instant moment—why—only He knows what would overtake it."

"And the wonder is He don't," continued Tom Turtle. "The wonder is He don't turn His back on it once for all—such an ungrateful mess of a place as 'tis."

"He'm too kind for that," declared Jacob. "Instead of letting it slide down the hill for good, He must needs show His Almighty pluck and patience and go on working at us and patching and mending and tinkering and worrying to get us on to the right way in spite of ourselves."

Timothy laughed.

"He's a botcher on your own showing then, gaffer. If He had been all-powerful and all-kind, wouldn't He have turned us out like the angels to begin with? But we're uneven, unfinished things, at the mercy of chance and the elements. Our bodies can be tormented at any moment by germs and foul poisons in the earth and the air and the water: and our souls can be tormented by things fouler than earth, air, or water—the beastly germs that get into our minds and breed and rot there."

"From the womb to the grave, we be unfinished creatures—that's a good word," said Ned Blackaller—"a good and a true word, and you can't deny it, Jacob."

"Why, a bird hatched out of an egg has more sense than a baby," declared John Redstone. "A human child is the foolishest young thing in the world—and a human ancient runs a very good second to him, so you'd best come home, my old dear, afore Timothy here makes you look silly."

"He won't do that," answered Jacob. "There's new knowledge and there's old, and I'm not arguing against the new: I'm only saying the old be good enough for me."

We can't believe anything away from faith, and faith says 'tis blessed to believe without understanding. You have faith, or you have it not. But since the brain is a weak member at best, I'd wish all might have faith over and above their reason, if 'twas only for their own happiness and content. We don't live long enough to get properly wise."

"No more we do," said Snow; "and we be planned on such a poor pattern that even the brains we have got give out afore our bodies."

"And that's what they'll say have happed to you, grandfather. So you and me had best trot off," said John.

"'Tis true that a man's wits fail him, just when he's got the experience of life behind him, and could serve the world best," admitted Blackaller, "and there's more to know every day, and no more brain-power for it. Knowledge increases, as you can see in every newspaper you open, but the mind of man don't get larger, and there's no more brain room. So knowledge runs over, and men go to the asylum."

"That's our pride, Ned," said Jacob, as John helped him into his coat. "That's our human pride. What we need know, the Lord made room for; and there's plenty of room for all that matters to turn round in the brain and settle down there. But if, like these rash and reckless chaps here, we go trespassing after knowledge and don't mind the notice-boards, then we must face the consequences. Faith a man must have afore he can get into Heaven, and there'll be a lot as will have to cool their heels a cruel long time, and sit outside and see the little childer go in afore them."

John chaffed, and Timothy argued; then the Redstones departed, and Seth Champion brought the subject back to Audrey Leaman. Snow had heard nothing of her disappearance and was interested.

"That red, young Redstone knowed more than he'd say, I believe," declared Blackaller. "If she's up to any mischief, she might have relied upon him to help, knowing his nature."

"'Twas always thought that policeman Moyle was her

friend," answered Campion. "But 'tis very clear, seemingly, that he knew nought of this, for a letter comed by post for her this morning, and the writing was his—it being very well known to my master through Moyle witnessing many a document for him. And there the letter bides on the mantelshelf over the kitchen fire. So 'tis easily seen he knew nought."

"If another Ilsington person be spirited off and never heard of no more, 'twill look as if the devil was in it," said Saul Butt.

Then a house-agent arrived to see Timothy Snow, and they were about to leave the inn together when four men suddenly entered.

The local inspector of police came first, and after him followed Frederick Moyle and two other constables. To Snow they came, and Timothy heard the usual formula. He was arrested for the murder of his uncle, and warned that anything he might say would be used against him.

The man staggered a moment, then he braced himself and held out his hands.

"If I'm suspected, I shall be only too anxious to clear myself," he answered.

When he was gone Thomas Turtle improved the hour. He trembled with excitement and fierce gratification.

"That's what your atheists come to!" he cried. "The wretch denied God afore us assembled. Well he might; and we, who have heard him speak, know without any more proof that he's guilty. No doubt he'd like to think there wasn't no God, and no awakening beyond the grave! But there's a rough awakening at hand for him; and we faithful people can thank God that it is so. 'Tis only the sinner finds God a puzzle; His ways be clear enough to the like of us. And I'll take my oath the man's got a hundred other crimes to his name—a sly, silent, shifty creature always. And now he's struck down with his stolen food in his mouth and the blood on his hand; and we faithful men can give the praise to the long-suffering God."

CHAPTER XI

ILSINGTON was seething, like a nest of ants into which some wanton boy has thrust a stick. Violent interest and frantic dismay clashed at every street corner. The people ran here and there and forgot their business. The women stood about the cottage doors together; the men filled the inns. Spendthrift chance, not content with one incident of a size to convulse the neighbourhood, exploded two simultaneously, and a rumour ran that there was some mysterious connection between the disappearance of Audrey Leaman and the arrest of Timothy Snow. Indeed, a thousand tales inaccurate and grotesque took wing, and certain journalists, who sprang upon the place with the return of day, found it hard to build a coherent story from the tissue of rumour.

Men bore false witness, not of purpose but because their small minds were overthrown by the sudden shock and its complexities.

At daybreak on the morning that followed Snow's arrest, John Redstone walked with his grandfather to the Moor edge above Ilsington, that the old man might meet Thomas Turtle, the carrier, and travel with him homeward, for Jacob was returning to Dury in Turtle's van.

"You took me from the fray just when I was getting warm for it," said John's grandfather. "I was calling up my opinions, and I'd have made a valiant fight against you and Ned and that chap, Timothy Snow, if you'd let me bide."

John, who carried the other's carpet bag, laughed at this, and, knowing not of the events that followed their departure from 'The Coach and Horses,' they conversed on milder matters and their own concerns.

"'Tis a grateful thing to see you and her so happy and content," said Jacob. "You lost her and suffered a lot, and then you saved her life, and so the watching Lord, Who meant her for you all along, brought her to you in His own time. And a man and woman closer in heart and soul I can't call to mind. But don't forget to be thankful, Johnny. Us ought to judge of people by themselves and their behaviour, not by what other people say of 'em—for or against. I've heard you say that very thing. Then you ought to judge of God, like you'd judge of anybody else, by the way He treats you. And you certainly did ought to be grateful."

"Not I—'tis all chance, and our luck depends on deaf and blind things that ban't interested in us. You heard what Timothy said."

"There's another! It do pass the wit of man to know why the poor and the persecuted cleave to their God through thick and thin, and the rich and the prosperous and the fortunate throw Him over without a blush. If there's two men living that ought to be on the Lord's side, 'tis you and Timothy; and yet you stood there and backed each other up. 'Tis a great trouble to me, and I hope you won't be smote for it."

"Don't you be frightened," answered his grandson, "we're all right; and if there's a God as be wishful for me and Timothy to believe in Him, no doubt He'll bring it about and make us."

Turtle's hooded cart was waiting for them, and Thomas enjoyed the rich pleasure of telling them the news. He narrated the main incident briefly, and then continued.

"Such a proper terrible come-along-of-it have never burst over Ilsington since I was a boy. Took him under our very eyes! I can hear inspector lock the handcuffs this minute. Grim as a ghost was Snow. Dazed like, but swore he was innocent, so I'm told, after he left the public house. A masterpiece of wickedness if 'tis true; and only too sure to be, when you think of the awful opinions of the man. And Audrey Leaman gone, and some have a dark feeling that he may be responsible. And old Sibella Snow very near died last night—'twas all the doctor could

do to keep her pulse moving. She was crying out all night, so Mrs Maine, the nurse, tells me, for I passed her at the door going home to her own house to look after her husband's breakfast. And Sibella cried out all through the long night hours, 'Now he'll lie in his grave—now he'll lie in his grave at last!' Meaning her brother Lot, for she was always terrible vexed as his bones didn't rest along with the family, under her chicket window as overlooks the churchyard. But so it is, for policeman Moyle have nosed out the poor wretch's carcase in Yarner Woods, and to-day they be going—they may have started by now—to fetch him up out of the pit, and sit upon him in due course. Now I must get on, and let it be known far and wide as soon as possible."

Jacob had climbed beside Mr Turtle during this narrative, and John went to the back of the cart with Mr Redstone's carpet bag, after he had helped his grandfather up. They called to him, but found that he had gone. The luggage was in the cart, and Turtle proceeded for Widecombe and Postbridge.

"As keeper, no doubt your grandson will want to have a hand in it," said Mr Turtle. "'Twill take the policemen all their time to keep the people out of Yarner this morning. And Frederick Moyle be the hero of the hour. Us shall hear more to-night, no doubt, and the newspapers will ring with it come to-morrow. We live in stirring times. I be ten year younger this morning, along of such desperate doings."

John Redstone had departed, stunned at the crash of this tremendous event. His first thought was to get back to Drusilla, but for a while she took second place in his mind. A natural instinct towards self-preservation dominated him and surged through him like a flood. Strange physical effects followed upon this psychical experience. The blood ran into his head and his sight was dimmed. He sat down on a stone and gasped, and felt his heart throbbing. He sucked in the air with huge suspirations, and presently found his body calmer. He regained self-control, only to lose it again when the full

significance of what had happened swept through his brain. Twice this occurred. Then it seemed that the man's understanding had digested the catastrophe. He was able to cope with it and look ahead.

But he did nothing in a hurry, for the will to live ran high in him, and much remained to know before any definite deed was called for. During a whole hour he sat as still as the stone beneath him, then a little order came into his mind. He remembered a thing he had meant to do that morning, and set out to do it.

It happened that Redstone was in the secret of Audrey Leaman and another. Knowing him, she had trusted him, and he had been of very practical service in helping her to leave her home. His sympathies were entirely with the step she had taken; but since she was now safe and her adventure complete and beyond opposition, he had meant to call at Middlecot before his morning's work began and set at rest the mind of Audrey's mother. He lit his pipe presently and walked down to Ilsington.

The post had just arrived when Redstone reached Middlecot, and there was a letter from Audrey. It told her parents what John knew already, that she was in London and would be married that morning. She promised to write full particulars in a day or two, but sent no address.

Redstone added nothing to the news, and said, when asked the reason of his call, that he was only there to hear if all was well with the daughter of the house.

He left Ilsington and overtook a dozen men journeying to Yarner. A body of police with certain labourers had started for the old mine, and they were led by Moyle. A cart accompanied them, and in the cart was a great coffin and ropes.

Accustomed for long months to regard himself as outside the tragedy of Lot Snow, Redstone experienced no difficulties at this stage of the proceedings. He knew an old path through the woods where a vehicle might go, and he undertook to lead the party to the mine. He walked beside Moyle, and heard him tell of his discovery. Moyle declared that it had happened but a few days before, and

that then, pursuing a secret search he had mapped out for himself, he had at last come to the actual hiding-place of the dead and found the corpse most carefully concealed under a heavy pile of brushwood and *debris* from the mine. Redstone's mystification was real enough, and he continued to move as in a dream. His brain played him tricks, and he could even find it in him to doubt how far he was implicated.

He led the party to the spot and then went about his business. His wife was to be at Manaton that day, and she would have left home before he could reach her.

He felt in some measure thankful that the news must fall upon Drusilla through another, and that she must know what had happened before they met. He wondered for a time how she would receive it, and began terribly to mourn for Drusilla's coming trial. Indeed, he thought now entirely about her, and not until the day was far spent did he return to his own future.

Hidden in a secluded place, where the water ran and the pines spread their flat arms over it, he reclined on the dead needles of the foliage and weighed the whole bearing of the thing that had happened.

His nature was not built to consider certain courses of action, but life and the joy of life cried with a trumpet tongue, and for a long time the need for any farewell to life did not appear. That Snow should suffer for his crime was unthinkable, but there were many other possibilities. Timothy might be able to prove that he was far from the place and innocent of any hand in the matter. Now Redstone longed to see Snow, and wondered whether he might do so. Since Snow was not the murderer, he would surely be able to prove that he was not. For a time his mind grew hopeful, but then it became darker as he weighed the chances. Anon it brightened again before another thought. Somebody had certainly concealed the dead, and it was possible that Snow had done so; but his reasons for doing so were obvious. He found himself suddenly thrust into the very heart of a murder, and saw the peril in which he stood. Instead, therefore, of proclaiming the deed, he took pains to hide

it up for his own safety. Thus John stumbled on the truth; yet the situation, thus cited, appeared so improbable that even the sanguine Redstone felt his heart sink again. If that were Snow's defence, none could be expected to believe him.

Until this stage in his reflections, interest and excitement had buoyed up Redstone's mind; but now a sort of reaction set in, and he began to grieve very terribly. He wasted no sorrow on Snow, understanding that Timothy was safe, and would presently be a free man in any event, but the peril in which he found himself, and the necessity for confession, which might too soon arise, cast him down. He drank the cup alone in the midst of the forest. Then Drusilla, dismissed for a season, rose to be the dominant figure of his thoughts, and his sorrow for himself became as nothing before his sorrow for her.

His impatient nature, roughly galled by the event of the day, began to fret and pull at the leash. A temper long under control and temporarily tamed by joy, woke and, like a giant refreshed, overmastered him. The need for patience and self-possession was awful to him. He felt a sudden longing to have done with it, to anticipate all and destroy himself at that instant. He knew life would not be possible lived thus. He grew distraught for a little while, and plunged through the woods, climbed the hills, and wearied his body with exaggerated toil and motion.

Then he sat down again and fingered his gun; and then he stared at himself from the outside and wondered at himself. A thousand things might happen. He felt himself strong enough to make things happen. Yet slowly, surely, the significance of this supreme thing over-crowded his courage. Before such a problem as this, he was weak. The herd values on most subjects would not have held him; feeble as gossamers they must have been, and powerless to restrain his action, or wound his conscience in the breaking; but from this pass there was no escape: his spirit was not built to let another man suffer for him.

There stole over him presently an utter weariness of mind. His thinking parts were exhausted. He turned to Drusilla, knew that he must meet her very soon, and

wondered whether she would come to meet him. He rose, went on to his regular beat and pursued it, that if she came she should find him.

Some order had settled upon his thoughts before even-tide. He meant to live a free man, if possible; he also meant to relieve Timothy Snow of anxiety at the earliest moment it could be done. The accused man must learn that he was safe; but he must also learn that Redstone did not intend to confess unless the necessity arose. He clung to life fiercely now. He determined to live 'double tides,' as sailors watch 'double tides.' He must win everything possible out of life, if life were indeed to end. He stood uncrushed in the threat of its ending, and believed that he possessed energy and courage to seek everything possible from all that might be left of it. He even debated how to fill the days, but that was easily answered. He must fill them with Drusilla. He was no longer sorry for himself, or anybody else, at this juncture. He girt up his loins to do all that might be done, and a consciousness of power returned to him. Here was a great happening—to be handled greatly. For a time he lost sight of the truth, because his weary brain could retain and focus it no more. His mind-picture grew blurred; a mist rose up between him and the reality of things. He became almost cheerful under his temporary escape; and when his wife approached him presently, he appeared as one mildly under the influence of liquor.

CHAPTER XII

HE stood in a clearing before Drusilla found him, and looked up at a sky nobly disposed for the approaching pageant of sunset. Much tenuous cloud was washed thinly over the firmament, and its delicate gauzes, flung fanwise out like a mighty tree of many branches, were spread from the eye of the west wind to ascend and ramify thinly over the lustrous blue of evening. Art could not have set a snare more perfect to mesh and tangle the sunset light; and when it came, branch after branch of the great cloud tree was fretted with rosy gold, and the wide sky broke into a glory of fiery flowers, that budded and bloomed upon the purple vapour. Athwart this vision there sped long shafts of burning mist; while above, at the zenith, flying clear of the pageant beneath, there swept a host of little cirri, that gleamed together like a flock of doves, all chequered pink and pearl.

Aloft the hills heaved very dark against the splendour of the sky; but Yarner took the light to her bosom, and the scattered remnant of foliage still clinging to the bough flashed back the splendour of the sunset. The solitary leaves blazed orange and cherry and scarlet against the sobriety of the woodlands. They twinkled and died upon the twilight as the sky faded; and then the earth-gloom rose and steeped the forest and spread an indigo darkness under the regiments of the trees.

A pallid spot presently moved towards Redstone where he stood in the clearing, and he knew that it was Drusilla's white apron. He waited for her, and she hastened when she saw him and flung herself speechless into his arms. She could not speak when they came together, but he

understood her thought, and plunged straight into their grief without preliminary.

"Them precious arms!" he said. "They'd keep it away if they could. But it don't depend on them. You've heard—maybe you've heard more than me. If Snow can clear himself, well and good—if he can't——"

She was shivering and hysterical. She could only cling to him and weep. He supported her.

"Don't think I've thrown up the sponge, or anything like that," he said. "I've thought it all out—to the very dregs—and I've looked at the dark side and I've looked at the bright side. I've even had time to be terribly interested at the difference between how I looked at the job and how the world looks at it. To me 'twas no more than shooting a carrion crow. I wouldn't have done it in cold blood, I dare say, but once done I cared nought. But now the world be faced with the deed, and the world's up in arms."

"I've thought for us too," she said. "I've heard how 'twas, and since you left the man in one place and he was found in another, you can't say you killed him. 'Tis madness and only killing yourself to come forward and say you killed him when you don't know whether you did or not."

"You clever thing! Don't fret your brains like that. Well I guess how busy they've been for me—but—no—we've got to face it out. If Snow be let off, then we're all right; if he ban't, then we're all wrong, I'm afeared. I must give myself up, or——"

"Never!" she said. "That's not needful however it falls out. We can run for it. We can write all the facts and make it so plain as need be that you did it; and then we can go and—— Say we can, say we can do something like that, John!"

"No," he answered; "if we was to get clear, they'd very likely not believe us, and do for Snow just the same. There's only one thing going to get us out of this fix, and that is for Timothy to prove he didn't do it. And that's how we're faced; and the first thing, if I have the power, is to see the man and set his agony of mind at rest."

"Think of me—think of me!" she cried. "Be that man or any man more than me? Ban't I first? Don't you

see that if you die, I die? I won't live another day—God's my judge—if you be going to die. I won't—I——”

“Hush—hush!” he said, holding her closely. “Of course I think of you first, and there's going to be no dying—nothing like that. I've thought it through and through, I tell you. If they convict Snow, then they'd hang him very like, because it would be a bad sort of murder if he'd done it and kept quiet after. But when I tell 'em 'twas me, and I say how I left him for dead under my blow and heard he had disappeared and so on, then, so like as not, they wouldn't hang me at all, but only shut me up for a score of years or so. But we be talking off book. 'Twill be time enough to see where we stand when we know where Snow stands. Tell me all you've heard about it.”

She had heard more than Redstone, and related her news.

“I met Mr Kingdon when I came back from Manaton, and he'd been up at Yarner House, where everything was known. Sir Percy signed the warrant, I believe, or had to do with it. And Timothy has confessed to some things but denied others. He's said he was innocent, of course, but he admitted other things. 'Twas him found his uncle, after you'd rode off with me, and, fearing to be mixed up in it, he hid his uncle. He grants that; he hid his uncle and kept silence, and even went so far as to lead the pony away out of Yarner. He says that, whether it sounds like truth or falsehood, 'tis the whole truth and nothing less.”

“So it is,” said her husband. “The truth for certain, yet I wish to God he'd kept the truth to himself, for 'twill sound terrible like a lie in every ear but yours and mine. He makes his chance of escape so much the smaller by telling that—and then——”

Redstone was much cast down before this news, and did not speak for some time. Presently he uttered an opinion.

“Timothy drove a good few nails into my coffin when he said that.”

“Don't—don't—for God's sake, don't think such things!” she cried. “Oh, life—our life!—It can't end—it can't be going to be cut off now it's just begun. The thing was so far away and did look so small and——”

“So I thought and felt,” he answered. “But we're going

to be reminded it wasn't small. Come home—lean on my arm. Don't you fret. I ban't going to leave you if it can be prevented."

"No," she said, "that you never shall. Where you go, I go; and if you've got to die, John, then you'll do well to put me out of the way first, for I don't live without you—never for a moment. I'm hungry for the grave a'ready, and so sure as we're parted, I die of it. You know me. I've been near enough to death to fear it no more; I've felt the worst of it."

"Bear up and don't talk of no such things. I've got a thought that they'll let Timothy off. I was wrong to say his words will look like lies. No man would invent such a tale as that. 'Tis true, and he'll make it good—mark me—he'll make it good, and the law will just give him a pinch belike and let him go. Come along and dry your eyes—else they'll think you be fretting for the man and love him still. What more have you heard? But we'll get home and have a cup of tea afore you tell me. I'm that leery—not a bite all day have I had."

"Hold me—hold me close," she said. "God knows how I've come through this day alive. I've cried to you in the woods this longful time, but you was thinking so deep you never heard me. And the terrors and agonies! The past was a play to this real thing. O my Johnny, twice I heard gunfire in the woods, and twice I thought——"

She sobbed and clung to him and hindered his going. He perceived that a great complication and added difficulty centred in Drusilla. Her nerve was broken. He tried to soothe her.

"Don't you think silly things like that. We understand each other as never man and woman understood each other afore. We'm light and life each to the other, and if one goes out, t'other be dimmed likewise. We'll go together, Dru. Don't you fret. I won't leave you behind—I swear that. Trust me. We be one for life or death. You'll share—everything."

He promised more than he had any intention of performing, but she took comfort from his words and endeavoured to control herself. The necessity to do so

was real, for many people moved in the woods, and Yarner had become a centre of fascination. Not only was the tragedy on every lip, but there had fallen out another strange and startling matter directly affecting the fortunes of the reigning house.

John and Drusilla entered their home unseen, and while she prepared food, she wearied him and distracted him with many tears. Her attitude surprised him, for he thought she would have been firmer. Then he remembered all that he was to her, and forgave her.

He affected cheerfulness, and made his wife listen to him. He retraced the circumstances, opened his mind and let Drusilla see nearly to the bottom of it. Some things indeed he hid, for already he perceived she could not go all the way that he might have to go, or decide between the alternatives with which he must swiftly be faced.

"I'm a whole man—not half one," he said; "I know that, because I look round and see what a lot of unfinished men there are in the world. Life and the policeman comes between men and manhood. 'Tis only the fearless or desperate can act as if there was no such thing as policemen. But I was a whole man when I rolled over that bullying, blustering brute and rid the world of a pest. I should have been a coward to stand his tongue more, and I should have been a fool to blab after. And, as to conscience, 'twould have been a lot more on my conscience if I had killed a fox. That's my point of view; but of course men in the lump don't share it, and now I'm up against men in the lump, I suppose. There'll be a judge and jury, and not one among 'em will be made of the stuff that could rise to killing a man single-handed like I did. But they'll rise to kill me herded together under the law. . . . I'm not the sort to be hanged, nor yet the sort to mind hanging, neither. . . . And yet—no—a human cur shan't choke me for money. 'Tis a wonder that such a filthy thing as a hangman can be found, come to think of it . . . There's some men I'd let hang for me, Dru. Yes, there are. There's some I'd let swing for me and not trouble about—worms of men, better underground than on it. I can call to mind such, and they might go and no loss. But not

him. Not Timothy Snow. He mustn't peg out for me. He's strong and useful. . . . 'Twas a fright, a passing terror no doubt made him do what he did. He was there looking for his old man, and he had just had a devil of a row with him. And then he found him dead with his forehead broke in. Then, for fear of getting tangled into it, he—— What a rum thing chance is! D'you see who's put the rope round Timothy's neck? Ha, ha! *You* have—you have, you poor woman, and no fault of yours, neither. How it runs out every way—the branches of it! Tim hears that old Lot separated you from him, and then he hopes that he may win you back yet. That makes life good again, and so he's a coward when he comes to the corpse. He wants so terrible bad to live and prosper and get you, that the thought of being caught up in this trouble frightens him out of his wits, and he does a damned silly thing—for love of you and for selfishness. And now just the thing he did to save himself have caught him . . . his love of life and hunger for you have caught him! And his days will be darkened for ever. . . . If news could get to the ear of the dead, old Lot will go to his grave very well content. He's got us all round—eh? They laugh best who laugh last—living or dead!"

She had little to say, but looked at him, listened and felt her nervous energies ebbing. Redstone seemed hard—even to her. But she would not let him out of her sight. She became hysterical and troubled him. Once he was harsh; then he expressed sorrow for the unkind word.

With darkness he went out and said he was going to speak with other men; but he did not. He entered the woods alone and moved under the trees and sought to plan the future fitly. His mind, however, was too weary for sustained reflection, and he kept beginning and breaking off. No coherent plan of action opened before him. He grasped fitfully at details; then even they evaded him. He found himself mentally powerless, and grew very impatient and fretful. His stormy temper gained strength as his mind weakened. His old hatred of detail and delay swept him forward. He longed for the thing to be finished and the future determined. His emotions at one time

made him stand still and pant and stare up at the stars. Death he felt would not be difficult — perhaps not so difficult as waiting. His own case was clear enough and his own action inevitable; but there was Drusilla and her future to consider. A longing to return to her sent him homeward, but he had changed again before he reached the door. He began to suspect that it would be better if he grew harsh to her. He might have a part to play presently. Something told him to begin loosening the bonds between him and his wife as soon as possible. If indeed they were to part, the quicker he prepared a way for the parting, the less she must be called to endure. For he had no mind that she should drink of his cup.

CHAPTER XIII

AMOS KINGDON fell in with Redstone on the following morning, and told how the dust of Lot Snow had been recovered and conveyed to Ilsington. He dwelt with gusto on the details, then proceeded to another subject.

"'Tis all out now about Audrey Leaman. My stars! what a girl! To play fast and loose with everything in a pair of trousers as she have—and then! They was all fish for her net—little scamp. Married and single and poor and rich, she'd please 'em and madden 'em and laugh at 'em. A bad character, and Lord knows where she came from, for a straighter woman than her mother or a harder sort of man than her father you'll not meet. But there 'tis—she's married a gentleman—properly, lawfully wedded, though only afore a registrar. 'Tis done for all time, and a Champernowne, if you please! Nothing less than a Yarner Champernowne she's aimed at! Master Eustace, of course; and I hear that Sir Percy had her photograph by post yesterday, and propped it on the toast-rack while he took his breakfast. He ate just as usual and drank just as usual—neither more nor less. 'Twas the footman told the butler, and the butler told my wife. And Tom Blick, the footman, stole a look at the picture, of course; and he says that the girl was in lady's clothes, and looked properly dazzling, as no doubt she does do."

Redstone laughed.

"I know," he said. "Me and her was very good friends, and long ago I promised to serve her if I could, and the chance came a few nights ago. Lord! what a lot have fallen out since! It seems as if 'twas years ago, but yet only a few nights. I helped her off, and he met her at

Exeter, and away they went, no doubt. He's a lucky chap, I believe. She's going to school, she told me; but I shouldn't think they'd have much use for her at a girls' school. 'Twill be lessons, more likely, to teach her to sing and behave proper among the upper people. A fine, fearless piece! She won't want much teaching. The men will always bow down afore her."

"'Tis strange to think that you and me may live to have Willes Leaman's daughter reign over us," said Mr Kingdon. "Major Champernowne hates Yarner, and he won't come here when Sir Percy passes; but the young chap likes it well. And so, in course of time, no doubt, he'll be here, and she'll be Lady Champernowne! And up to the very last that policeman, Moyle, was after her. By the same token, he's got into trouble, for a letter he wrote to Audrey was opened by her father yesterday—and he handed it to the police."

Kingdon explained the facts, and Redstone was more interested than he appeared to be. Chance for once played Nemesis on a scale of human values, and Mr Moyle reaped an unexpected reward for his action. His letter to the girl made it clear that he had discovered the murder some time before he proclaimed it, and that under certain circumstances he had even been prepared to conceal the crime. Him, therefore, we leave a policeman no longer, for he was dismissed the force.

Time passed and the position became defined. Science proved how Lot Snow had perished from a blow on the temple that broke his skull; the coroner's jury brought a verdict of wilful murder against persons unknown, and Timothy Snow, arrested on suspicion, prepared to stand his trial for the murder when Christmas was past.

He was in prison at Exeter, and Redstone, visiting his lawyer privately, learned that it would be possible for him to have an interview with Snow.

To John's impatient spirit the long ordeal was excruciating, and he knew not how to wait until trial and sentence determined his ultimate action; but no little had to be done immediately, and his first purpose was to relieve Snow's mind at the earliest opportunity. Sometimes a

wave of hope overtook him ; more often he felt that the end was inevitable, and lusted to hasten it and have done. The strain revealed weakness in Drusilla—a sort of weakness he had not guessed at. He found it impossible longer to discuss the situation with her, for she had lost self-control, and was of no more service or support to him than a child had been. He was tender and patient with her, and at times a spirit of recklessness plunged him into pleasure. He ate and drank, feeling that to-morrow he might die. His hold on life astonished himself. He was in his prime, bursting with vitality and vigour. It is impossible to imagine life possessing greater worth for any man than it possessed for him. But he saw things in his wife's eyes that hurt him. He loved her no less that she could count all the world as well lost, given only him ; but he marvelled that his standards of justice were such a slight matter to her weighed in the balance against his life and liberty. She made proposals. She suggested that he should leave a full account with Snow's lawyer and then depart. She urged that they should go at once, so that half the length of the world might hide him before the trial. But he was not built so to act, and the fact that he did not put her wishes first in this matter puzzled her. She would have shut her eyes to the danger in which Snow stood ; she would have hidden her head in the sand—to blind her senses to what might follow ; and this attitude Redstone could not comprehend in her. But that he could not comprehend it made Drusilla frantic. He argued rationally ; he explained that no shadow of doubt must exist as to Snow's ultimate salvation ; he showed her how any such shadow (though he and she were hidden at the antipodes) must swiftly find them, choke them and smother them. Life in such a shadow must prove a physical impossibility for him, however she might make shift to breathe under it. He toiled to reveal his point of view, and performed amazing feats of patience for a man so constituted.

In course of time he reconciled her to the fact that Snow had already suffered enough, and then her natural pessimism had free vent. She grew ill ; she slept no more ;

by night a thousand horrors haunted her. She shattered his sleep, stole in upon the silence and loneliness that his soul craved at this season, added dark torments and temptations to the tragic colour of his days. Ceaselessly he strove to establish her in reason and justice, that she might face the future and make her preparations on a sure foundation.

"You be outside it, my darling woman, remember that," he said vainly again and again. "The thing itself have nought to do with you one way or another. Suffer you must, but you can't do anything more than be brave."

It seemed that ages passed in an hour at this season, but in reality very few days followed the inquest before Redstone visited Snow with the lawyer.

CHAPTER XIV

REDSTONE had informed Snow's legal representative that he desired to make an important and private communication to the prisoner; and he had also told the lawyer that what he had to say was not for him.

"'Tis about his uncle," he explained, "and no doubt, in good time, he'll tell you what I want to tell him if there's any need for you to hear it; but at present there is not."

They visited Timothy together, therefore, and the lawyer purposely spoke with the warders, that Redstone might escape interruption and do the thing he had come to do.

Snow was resigned. He had told the exact truth, and those destined to defend him were not sanguine that it would be accepted. They had, indeed, warned him that his case was grave. Secretly they believed him guilty. He spent his time in thought, for his private theory of the crime appeared to have broken down, and its failure added one more hue of darkness to the situation in which he found himself. For a time he had expended utmost energy of mind upon the problem, and exhausted his mental powers in striving to strengthen his brief. But now imprisonment and anticipation worked their inevitable way, sapped his hope, harrowed up his nerves, broke down his strength and confidence, reduced him to the dead level of all who find themselves in a like situation. He lost heart as the days passed and no news reached him. He was concerned chiefly with his mother, for there he knew the blow must fall most heavily. There had never been any great devotion between them, but she was proud of him in her unemotional way, and he believed that this charge pushed home would be likely to destroy her mind. He judged

by himself, for he felt his own intellect weakening now. There came over him a longing to be through with it for good or evil. He despised himself for the situation in which he found himself. That he—a strong man and one above the herd of men in every way—that he should now lie here at the mercy of the herd was gall to him. That his single folly should have found him out so swiftly; that he should be forced to confess before the nation of his panic terror—this was very vile to him. His case must be bad enough if he was believed and liberated; but it seemed probable that he would not be believed. Man would doubtless think he lied and so destroy him, as an evil force inimical to the common weal. He would sink to shameful death and leave a hateful memory. The career he had pictured was crumbling into this; the sword that chance had placed in his hand—it would be chronicled that he had murdered an old man to secure it.

Snow alternated between renewed hope and fear. Then life sank away from him, its interests waned, and he found himself only hungry to reach the end of this long-drawn terror and have done.

When he and Redstone met, therefore, their attitude to the future was very similar. Both felt the necessary suspense almost beyond their endurance; both yearned to shorten time and come face to face with what the future still held concealed from them. But Redstone's advent told the prisoner all that he needed to know. It came as the event long expected, it explained everything; it showed Snow's secret theory of his uncle's death was the true one. At first it almost restored his self-respect.

For he had long identified Redstone with the catastrophe. He had even been jealous of the power that could stretch a man dead and then go forward indifferently, without one shadow of remorse. He had arrived at a conclusion very near the truth; and it had shamed him not a little to reflect upon his own conduct when the blood of Lot Snow had touched his feet. But life is life, and all the lesser emotions were swept away for a while when he sat close to Redstone, heard the confirmation of his suspicion and learned that he was safe.

They spoke beyond earshot of the warders, for John's companion engaged them in conversation, and they were just men, without desire to increase the awful difficulties under which the prisoner laboured. Redstone therefore spoke freely, and explained to Snow how and under what conditions he had struck down his uncle, how he had in the same moment found Drusilla, how, while he had taken one life he had saved another.

"I guessed at it," said Timothy. "Why, I can't tell, and it matters nothing. But somehow I saw you do this; and the better I've known you since I came home, the surer I felt you could have done it without suffering from your conscience for it. And I didn't blame you, Redstone. It seemed to me you'd done a useful thing, and rid the world of a worse than useless man. I felt, as no doubt you felt after 'twas done, that, since it was done, it was well. I understand as if I'd been there. He drove you frantic; you struck, and it was all over. You couldn't draw back the blow. And I'll be as frank as you. You've heard my defence, and you know 'tis true. 'Tis worse than death to me to have played the coward; but truth's an ugly thing oftener than not, and afore that fallen man, seeing the nature of my hopes and fears at the moment when I found him, a coward I was. I'd change places with you gladly—God's my judge—for you've been brave, any way, and practised what I preached; but now—now how stands it between us?"

Redstone listened. Then he explained his wishes.

"The law don't take into account the ins and outs of a thing, and you can't remove the biggest, damned scoundrel on the face of the earth, so long as he don't quarrel with the laws. But I did, and now what I troubled nothing about have rose into this. Of course you're all right—that goes without my telling you. But there's others to be thought upon, and they must be thought upon. Of course I mean my wife. She knows the truth. But she's wrapped up in me—I'm her life and soul—and 'tis natural, for her sake as well as my own, that I want to make a fight for it if I can. You see that, Timothy?"

"Yes, and I see more than that. You must remember

what she was to me and what I was to her. I tell you this : her good is more than yours or mine in this matter."

Redstone was moved.

"That's a fine thing to say," he answered, "and I wish very much it was true. It may be that come what will her good will happen. The best that could fall out is that you should be found innocent and let off, and no more said. But, failing that, 'tis not her good or anybody's good—one more than another—that must be done. There's only one thing can be done. That's my work, none else's. I'm here now to ax you to stand your trial, knowing you need feel no fear nor terror about it any longer. I ax that because I want to have the chance that's left of escaping. I don't intend to be in the same fix as you are ; because I can't get out of it like you can. So I offer this, and ask you, as a favour, to try and prove the truth so far as you are concerned. The truth be often far harder to prove than a lie, and so it will be here. But your lawyer men may do it. And if they do, I breathe again ; and if they don't—well, 'tis no odds for you."

Snow listened. His secret relief was enormous. He could with difficulty conceal the thankfulness that surged in great pulses through his heart. He was to live and go free. Imprisonment became a jest. To see the judge don the black cap would be matter for laughter. It was only by fixing his mind on the haggard man before him that he could preserve decent gravity. The shadows of death had indeed lifted from his own shoulders, but they were darkening the face of the other. He considered Drusilla, and instantly grew sober enough.

"I understand," he said. "'Tis what one would have expected of you. And my only wonder was that I hadn't heard sooner. Indeed, I'd come to think latterly that I must be wrong, and that you hadn't done it. Now, of course, I'll stand my trial and do my level best to prove I'm innocent. And I'll say more when I think upon you and her—your wife. 'Tis a question which of us be the more useful man and the more wanted. Perhaps I ought to say 'tis no question—feeling what I feel about her."

Redstone reflected.

"There's a lot to be said and thought about that. You was fond of her, and that's nothing; but she was fond of you—and that's a great deal."

"You're her life now, however. Those are your own words. So far as I can see, the next move's with me."

Redstone laughed. There was the old ring in his voice, for his laugh came from the lungs.

"Well, we'll leave it so for the moment. But don't you play any games out of a fancied kindness or anything like that; it might spoil all. You go through with your trial first, and do your level best to get clear; then we'll see how the way goes. You're safe as a church—that's all I be here for—to let you know that. 'Tisn't for you to think of other people and their luck—'tis for you to know that right will be done, and that the law's powerless against your innocence. You're safe every way, remember. All the judges on earth and all the juries, too, can't hurt you, for 'tisn't only my word. I've got a witness, mind. My own wife saw it, and come the pinch she's as straight as me."

He meant no hurt by this speech; he said it out of simple good-fellowship to lift the darkness of the accused man; but it was inevitable that such an aspect of the situation must cast Snow into a nether depth, and so it did.

The interview was now ended, and Redstone prepared to depart.

"Good-bye, and good luck and a long life to you!" he said.

Then Timothy's visitors went their way, and Snow was left alone. The lawyer, as he learned later, knew nothing of John's information, and Snow perceived that it must remain hidden until after the trial.

Life darkened for him then, and he sank into profound abysses, suffered utmost agonies, surprised many a mean secret of human instinct sneaking through the recesses of his soul. Thoughts that he had not conceived possible crept out of his brains. He loathed himself for them, nor knew in his shuddering, that primal instincts are inherited and not within control of the noblest spirit.

They must escape from the mind in shape of thought. To detect them is to scorn them; to escape breeding them, given the stimulus, is impossible. Thoughts—so he tried to suppose—may be no more than alternatives set forth in a mechanical brain, driven by its own machinery to ring the permutations and combinations of every given circumstance. Thus alone could he reconcile to his conscience certain hateful dreams, hopes, and hideous desires that overtook him now. He pictured Drusilla free; he saw that only Redstone's destruction could prove his own innocence. Then some natural heritage of pride and temper, hidden deep in him, hoped that he would not escape but be convicted, since only through conviction could perfect vindication come.

But the heart that harboured these human emotions could also soar on wide wings, and out of the welter of his thoughts there trembled and steadied presently certain noble inspirations. They puzzled him and yet persisted, like steadfast rainbows on the fury of a storm cloud. They puzzled him, because they seemed a negation of all that he thought and believed and professed, a contradiction of his rooted opinions and ideas. For he had often declared pity and self-sacrifice to be but barren folly; he had felt positive that self-expression is higher than self-sacrifice, and that the mighty of the earth are not those whose shoulders ache under other's burdens.

He had ample leisure to reflect through the silences of long nights; he even fought the growing doubts, and told himself that he was a traitor to himself; he explained these spiritual rainbows, but he did not explain them away. He suspected that they were a survival and must be ignored; he supposed that his heart was tamed, that his physical imprisonment had stricken the true courage and pure egoism of his nature, had excised them, emasculated them, and applied an ointment of the old mother-taught values to the wound. For a time he trembled at his promptings, fearing them to be sprung from pure Christianity—a thing intensely hateful to his nature. But a curious accident relieved him of this suspicion and drove him still further along the transcendent path that

for a while he trod. There was a copy of Plutarch's "Lives" in the prison, and he found from it that human heroism is not a prerogative of creed, but a thing far higher than all creeds.

To analyse the subsequent processes of his mind were interesting by virtue of their great complexity, but the trend now set steadily toward some sort of sacrifice. He knew not exactly of what nature his abnegation might be, and he perceived that he must lie more or less at the mercy of John Redstone. His pride whispered to him that his thoughts were taking a higher flight than Redstone's, and there came with this belief a doubt whether self-preservation, at this stage of his life, might not be a deeper service to the world than the preservation of Redstone. He felt himself to be the more valuable man. Then Drusilla obscured any plain issue. She had not thrown him over for any lack of love, but for fulness of love. She had suffered him to slip out of her life for his own welfare. Her's had been a mighty self-sacrifice. Her love for him, in truth, had lived no more after such handling, but. . . . How she would love him if he were able to save her husband! For a time he told himself that he was powerless; that at best he could only stand his trial and trust to chance. Even if he pleaded guilty, Redstone would come forward and call upon his wife to prove that he indeed had killed Lot Snow. The law did not allow a wife to give evidence against her husband; but the judge would know of it, since a life hung upon it. It was certain that he could not save Redstone by pleading guilty. For a time his thoughts stood still; then the man's relentless mind forced an alternative upon him. There was still open a road by which he might cut the ground from under Redstone's feet, and implicitly confess to the crime by an act which would relieve the other man of all necessity to tell the truth. If that was to be the way, he must take it quickly. But he did no such thing. He hesitated, resented the inspiration, turned from his heroic dreams and sought to convince himself that they sprang of faulty ideals. He hated the thought of being a victim. The victim was always the slave to the

herd—slave to the base—slave to duty—slave to physical or mental pressures, it mattered not which. He told himself that he asked himself too much. The thought to play the slave and sacrifice himself was not nobility but a pusillanimous and futile recrudescence of old values that had surprised him. He endeavoured to dismiss this consideration of suicide as a vain and a vile thing, but he did not succeed. Meantime, the days during which the commission of such an act would be possible ran swiftly out, and his trial approached.

CHAPTER XV

THERE had fallen the first snow, and it was heavy. For a week the cold persisted, and earth, fortified by frost to support the burden, lay deeply buried.

The time was come for Timothy's trial, and now Drusilla and her husband, tramping the high ground above Yarner, spoke concerning it. They had left little to say or think upon the situation, and Redstone, seeing that his own vision was clear and his determination fixed, of late had found necessity to deceive his wife. He tried for a long time to guide her to his own point of view, exercised great patience, and strove in a thousand ways through weary wastes of speech to bring her to it ; but naturally he failed. Exercise what care he might, the moment the vital problem was reached ; the moment life or death came to be the matter and the question arose of Redstone's future actions if Snow were sentenced to capital punishment—then did Drusilla instantly grow frenzied. But for all his own turmoil, John never bated of patience and sympathy. They were grown very close together again before the end, but it was an understanding founded on Redstone's deception. He pretended at last to see with his wife's eyes ; he conceded that there was much to be said on both sides ; he left the future to declare itself, and admitted possible courses which to his secret spirit were inadmissible.

She had begun to dread his evasion at this stage, and while they tramped the snow together, she asked him to be clear.

"I must be, very soon," he answered, "for we shall know how we stand the day after to-morrow, if not to-morrow night. The trial, they tell me, is like to be very short, for there's

scarce any witnesses. 'Twill be what they call circumstantial evidence—as most murders hinge upon."

"Do Timothy want to live same as you do?" she asked. The question was significant, and had showed an observer her desperate state of mind. Drusilla would have shuddered at such naked thoughts in the past; now life itself went naked and unashamed when she was with her husband. She neglected decencies and the subtleties that she had ever prided herself upon. She avoided all people but Redstone, since the futility of everyday matters and the barren triviality of all earthly affairs, save her own, made the companionship of others impossible at this crisis. Redstone had driven her to them, that she might distract her thoughts; but she could not suffer it, and had some ado to keep from screaming or losing self-control when among her kind. He was more reticent than she, and wondered at her; but no cause existed for wonder since terror banishes pudency and strips to the bedrock of the soul.

"Yes, he did want to live, and why not?" John answered Drusilla now. "His good time's coming, poor devil, and so it ought to. He's had plenty to turn him grey and sour. He tried to hide what he felt, but my wits have grown sharper of late, and I couldn't fail to mark his thanksgiving. 'Twas like a dog as thinks his dinner be forgot, and then turns round to find it coming. He wagged his tail, I warrant you—couldn't help it! Things have fall'd out very fair, come to think upon it, Drusilla. I've had my good time, and, seeing how damned good it was, you can't be churlish and say 'twas short. 'Twas up to the brim—a full cup. But Snow—think how his cup was dashed from his lip—twice over. A thing to break even the toughest spirit; and his spirit's broke all right: you can read that in his eyes. Twice it fell out, you see. First he won you and lost you. Bad enough to lose you, but hell to lose you after winning you. And then the money and power—and afore he'd properly gripped 'em and settled what to do with his life—just at the first sip of the cup—gone! Gone, and death grinning at him instead. And a nasty, ugly death for a proud man—ugly even if he deserved

it — shattering and bewildering and beyond belief if he didn't. All that I marked ; and then to find the clouds lifting and see the blue again ! Yes, faith, he was glad. He wouldn't be human if he hadn't been."

Her mind had wandered.

"I'd wait till I was grey and old for you, John. Anything—anything but never to see you again."

"Leave that. I know what you are. D'you think I'm not putting you first and your future? All will be well, I tell you. You must trust me to do what is fitting, Drusilla. 'Tis a stupid piece of work, but what be men made for but to cut knots and cleave their way through the tangle of life? This be man's work in front of me, seemingly, and life ought to be man's work, I reckon—man's work and woman's work—each to their own. You and me ban't shirkers. We'll do what's appointed—no coward you."

Thus vaguely yet of set purpose he often talked now, and left her unsatisfied and doubtful of his intentions. He desired to create this doubt in her. He developed an immense craft and subtlety in his dealings with her. Since his own mind was made up, he had found himself free to think of Drusilla, and he left no stone unturned to order the falling out of affairs with an eye to her future. He had the past to guide him, and knew her nature and the dangers that would beset her ; but he was sanguine that he might preserve her and leave the door open to future content, even if the way she must tread were steep and hard.

At the moment that the trial of Timothy Snow was taking place, the Redstones were bound for Dury to wish Jacob many happy returns of his birthday ; but John hesitated presently and looked round about them. They had not yet reached Widecombe, and the snow began to weary Drusilla. North-westward the day grew very dark again, and the sun soon vanished.

"We'll hold on a bit longer, but I'm feared we shan't get there," said John.

Snow humped in masses on the gorse and swept in ridges and sheets with the undulation of waves. Over the face of these frozen billows were visible just those delicate

surface reticulations to be seen in water, for their planes were pencilled and fretted by the fingers of the wind. Upon a miniature plan the phenomena were those manifested by mountains and eternal snows. Here were crevasses, cornices, bridges—all on a fairy scale. In ruts and ravines the way was swept almost clear, and over these tracts the fine snow sped like smoke. Here and there were traces of beasts and birds, and Redstone told his wife what creature had caused them. She marvelled to hear him interested in such matters now. He pointed to a little spore, like the impress of one small horse-shoe repeated in a line across a smooth sheet of snow.

"Now what should you guess made that?" he asked. "You would think 'twas the hoof of the devil, or a one-legged jackass. But 'tis only a rabbit, after all. He lops along, and his forepaws make a hole in the snow together, and then he brings up his hind pads, that he squats on, and they are just wide enough apart to make the sides of the shoe." He pointed out the track of a fox presently. "You can tell 'twas a fox and not a dog by the trail of his brush," he explained.

The snow began to fall again; it was very cold, and Drusilla, in no case for a fight against the weather, agreed gladly to the suggestion they should go back.

"Grandfather will be terrible disappointed, but not surprised," said Redstone. "The snow will have told him long ago 'twas unlikely we should be there, but the wind's going round, and it ban't going to last."

A fleeting sun-gleam broke in a fan of fire through the clouds and gilded the desert. The light shone like gold on the snow, wheeled and vanished.

They turned, and Redstone walked between his wife and the wind.

"Us'll go home and have a cosy time, and drink gaffer's good health in a drop of liquor," he said.

In little more than an hour they were at home, and by that time the wind had shifted and the snow turned to sleet.

After nightfall it was raining and thawing fast. In the woods ran a sound of snow slapping down in lumps from

the fir-trees. When the day was spent, under pretext of work, John went out and climbed by a hill tract from his home to that of Amos Kingdon at the lodge gates. He guessed that the sentence might be known, but it was not. Kingdon's son had returned late from Ilington, but the last telegram received only told how the jury retired to consider their verdict. More could not be learned until the morning.

Even this much, however, Redstone did not tell again when he returned to Drusilla. He pretended to be in good spirits, and, knowing her superstitious nature, fooled his wife, laughed in her eyes, and declared that a conviction amounting to certainty reigned in his mind.

"He's free—a free man. Something tells me that 'tis so," he declared. "I've a feeling in me that the first moment possible to-morrow a telegram will come to me with the words, 'Free—Snow.' I see it so plain as if 'twas stuck up against the mantelshelf! But I must be away at dawn, for there's shooting to-morrow, so 'twill be for you to open it."

Thus he calmed her, and half fired her with his pretended inspiration. But when the night was come and she slept heavily, he rose without wakening her, went to the kitchen, drew out some sheets of lined "foolscap" and wrote laboriously for two hours. He had no practice in this medium, but laboured to make his statement absolutely clear. Completing it at length to his satisfaction, he sealed the letter with wax, marked it "immediate," and directed it to Timothy Snow's lawyer at Newton Abbot. He then hid it in the pocket of his velveteen coat, and prepared to return to bed. Before doing so he looked out into the night, and found that the rain had ceased. The moon shone and the woods glittered against their inner darkness. The snow at these lower levels was nearly gone already, but it persisted in one deep drift which he could see from his cottage door. He looked at the earth and sky and saw the chimney of the old mine towering black from one to the other. Against the woods it hove, and they, too, were dark but meshed in the silver hazes of the moonlight, and washed with a tremor of faint pearl where the birches glimmered. A night bird

screamed, and through the silent hour the swollen waters of the brook made a loud crying.

Redstone returned to bed and slipped beside Drusilla without wakening her. His thoughts were such that he slept no more.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN REDSTONE rose betimes, and explained to Drusilla that she must be patient.

She woke under the incubus of the day and desired him not to leave her ; but he departed after the morning meal.

"Expect me when you see me," he said, and set off. He stole a backward glance as he moved away and saw that Drusilla was still watching him, whereupon he waved his hand and looked back no more. Something moved in her heart and she was tempted to cry out to him, but she controlled herself and went about her duties.

The man proceeded straight to Ilsington, and, passing to the post-office, met a doctor coming out of the dwelling of the Snows beside the lich-gate. The incident in some way told him all that he came to know. He stopped the medical man and learned the verdict incidentally.

"The old women are both pretty bad. Miss Snow's had a fit, and she's little likely to get over it. Mrs Snow—his mother—has collapsed, but she'll be all right presently."

He spoke, assuming that Redstone would follow him.

"The verdict's out, then?"

"Yes. He's to be hanged. The summing up went all against him, and the judge, when passing sentence, told him he could give no promise of reprieve. He rather rubbed it in. Of course, there never was any doubt."

Redstone nodded.

"It all fitted very close together," he said.

"There's not a question in the mind of any sane man," answered the other. "I go by deeper things than mere circumstantial evidence, and always believed that he was

guilty from the first. I judged by character. I knew the man fairly well. He was godless and ambitious. What more natural, being restrained by no moral law and having no religion, that he should give vent to his ambition and take the opportunity offered? He clutched at power, and it has brought him to this."

The doctor bustled off, but Redstone stood still for a moment. Then he felt in his pocket for the letter written during the night and went to the post-office. A dozen men and one or two women were congregated outside scanning a telegram stuck in the window.

"He's got it, John," said Saul Butt, the woodman, who was among them.

"So I hear, poor devil," said Redstone. Then he posted his letter and went up the village.

Butt growled.

"All very well to say 'poor devil,'" he remarked. "But I should like to know the man as will tell me Snow be going to have more than he deserves."

Redstone meanwhile returned to the lich-gate, considered a moment, and entered the house of the Snows. He asked to see Timothy's mother, and was told by the parish nurse that he could not do so; but he insisted.

"It's something concerning her son—a very important thing, and more like to mend her than any doctor's stuff," he said.

Mrs Snow was dressing, but came to him with a shawl round her, and her scanty grey hair about her neck.

"Come in a private place, missis; I want to speak to you. 'Tis very important for you and yours."

They stood in the parlour presently, and he told her in brief words that her son was innocent.

"I meant you should be the first to hear if the verdict went wrong. None else matters much now. Your son is safe—quite safe—and he knows he's safe—and he'll be free so soon as ever 'tis cleared up. I've just wrote it all off to the lawyer. So you be cheerful and happy. He'll come home very soon, and not a stain on his name. 'Twas right you should know. Trust me, I tell nought but the truth. You can let Miss Snow hear, if she ban't past

hearing—her and everybody. The name of the man that did it will be known to-morrow, if not sooner. Keep up—don't droop—don't give way! All's well with Timothy. Let everybody know that. I'll call the nurse to 'e. And now I must be away, for I'm busy."

He left her, sitting where she had suddenly sunk on a chair, called to the nurse and went out. Then he started for the Moor, walked swiftly up from Ilsington, climbed the hill under Bag Tor, and presently reached the high-road to Widecombe. The snow was fast melting; the day was grey and raw, but no rain fell. He sped forward in full strength and vigour, yet his feet could not keep pace with his desires. There were things to be said that must be said, and he was very impatient to say them. He thought only of Drusilla during his walk, wondered whether his way was the right one, and concluded that it must be. His plans were complete: they had been founded on recent circumstances, for he had felt sure of the verdict.

He overtook an acquaintance travelling the road beyond Widecombe, and fell in with Seth Campion, bound for Dury. He carried his arm in a sling. Seth in his slow voice bade him "good-morning."

"I be travelling to see your grandfather," he said. "Essterday was his birthday, and I was going up over to take my dinner along with him; but the snow came, and it looked a bit ugly just when I should have been on my way; and knowing the wisdom and understanding of the old man, I said to myself, 'He'll not be surprised if I don't come, owing to the unshed snow in the elements.' And so I be going now instead. I be at large for the minute, owing to my hand festering where a turnip knife slipped and went home to the bone very near."

"I'm for Dury too, and 'twas the snow turned me back yesterday—me and my wife."

"Let me tell him," said Mr Campion. "'Tis seldom I get the chance, owing to age and deafness, to be first with a piece of news. But I rose afore light to-day, and only waited till the red paper went up in the post-office to be off. But of course you over-got me with them long,

young legs of yourn. However, I should much like to bring the awful news to Jacob."

Redstone laughed.

"You shall tell him, Seth. But I'm wanting a bit of a private talk with him after. You'll not mind that?"

"'Tis only just to see his face grow long and his old jaw fall. And more: I've got what may be news to you. But first there's Timothy Snow, of course. 'Tis a hugeous come-along-of-it and a cruel blow. They Snows be a cussed race, seemingly. The Lord have set his face against 'em, and wiped one out by the hand of t'other—a favourite trick of the Almighty's, that. He'll be hanged, without the least doubt, it seems. 'Tis like a dream. And to think of that great carcase hid in the wood for rats to make merry with, and Timothy handling the money! The brain reels afore such mysteries. A murderer's nerve he had, no doubt. Then there's Willes Leaman and Mrs Leaman, my master and mistress, and the amazing matter of Miss Audrey—Miss Audrey I call her; but she's Mrs Eustace Champernowne now, and be coming to see her parents and Sir Percy presently. They arrive o' Friday week, and I'd give a month of my wages to see her go afore Sir Percy. A high moment for her, I warn 'e, Redstone! But she'll stand up afore him in all the strength and pride of her Lunnon clothes, and if he hardens his heart against her, he'll be the first man as ever was known to do it."

"Tim Snow hardened his heart against her."

"Thank God he did. But that weren't Audrey's fault. For the man's heart was full—full of red murder and dark plots and devilries. There was no room in it for love of a woman. My master waited on Sir Percy three days agone, and found him dry as a bone about it. No temper, nor harsh oaths. 'What's done be done,' was his word. And Audrey's great Dane dog, by the name of 'Battle,' be gone to Yarner to welcome her! At her special wish it was sent for—so you see her power begins already. A footman came for it in the Yarner livery. Leaman be getting a thought puffed up, in my opinion, and his wife's bursting with pride. Audrey will go to the Royal Court in fulness of time. Ess,

I heard Mary Leaman telling Mrs Chad and Mr Blackaller that her daughter would appear afore the King and Queen afore many more years had passed. In fact Mary Leaman's got a good bit above herself and she dared to ax her husband if she might go and call on Sir Percy and take a look at the house. But he forbade it. Then she axed to have a walk in the woods. And he wouldn't let her do that neither; so she just went on the quiet, and Kingdon met her in the midst, and didn't know for his life whether to turn her going or let her bide. But he decided, being a man of foresight, to let her bide. And so he did. 'Tis a mizmaze of a world surely, and us people of Ilsington be the centre of it for the minute. England's eye is upon us without a doubt, and every tongue is telling about us. But 'twill soon calm down again and be forgot as such things are."

Old Jacob Redstone was much delighted to see his visitors.

"Well now! The two men I like best in the world, and both together! You be welcome, I'm sure. I gived up hope of 'e yesterday along of the harsh weather. But I'm sure as you wished me well. How's Drusilla, Johnny? "

"All right; and I'll ax you to let me write a letter, grandfather, afore I go further. 'Tis important, and you can have a tell with Campion while I do it; and after that I must have a tell with you."

Thus the matter fell out, and Redstone wrote a long letter to his wife.

Then Seth went to look at the stock and talk to a hind, while grandfather and grandson spoke together.

The younger plunged instantly to the heart of the matter, but deeply mourned the blow that he must strike.

"My old dear," he said, "I've got some bitter news for you; but you have weathered a peck of trouble in your time, and, be it as it will, though you and me have got to part, it won't be for long, if there's another world after this, as you think."

"Part, Johnny! What be you after now? What a rush of news! 'Tis almost too much for my old brains. Here's poor Snow doomed, by all accounts—doomed to die—an awful thing for his mother—and——"

"Listen. If there was only you, I think I wouldn't tell

you, for 'tis a thing will hurt your tender heart a good bit. But there's more than you—one more—my wife. Grandfather, I must hand Drusilla over to you. You needn't waste time or tears on me. You must fight for her, and keep a stiff upper lip for her, and steer her into some sort of peace and keep her going. With time she'll come through. 'Tis a hard fight for an old man to fight. But you're the brave sort—you'll win. 'Twill be the grandest thing in all your life, my old hero, if you bring it off."

"What the mischief be you talking about, John? I can't make top nor tail of it."

"How should you? My mind runs on so to the future and what'll happen after, that I be forgetting what must happen first. Always impatient, you see! Well, grandfather, you must hold up and trust, as you be used to trust, that's all right at bottom and nought happens that didn't ought. And then it won't look so bad. In a word—this business of Timothy Snow. He didn't kill old Lot. . . . 'Twas me, grandfather. In a rage I hit him down—just fell into a passion under his sharp tongue and my wrongs. And the next minute I found Dru at her last gasp, for she saw me slay the old devil. And then I forgot all about him."

"Johnny, you're mad!"

"Not a chance. Just listen quietly, so as you shall have all clear. I've come to it slow, but terrible sure. I've weighed it all round. Some things had to be, but I went in long doubt about the way of them. I've got to go, grandfather. I've done what I've done, and I must quit. And the pain of killing myself would be nought against the pain of being killed by another man, or the pain of being shut up for twenty years—shut up to rot alive. I won't rot till I be dead, you must know. . . . The price must be paid, of course. . . . And Drusilla—she wants to come along of me; but she can't. First she's got to keep alive to clear Timothy—then for herself—and for you. Well, we've had a grand time—a grand time. Nothing could be better or finer than the time we've had. We don't leave off in the middle but at the end. . . . We've had all—all that my manhood and her womanhood and love could give

us. Nought could be better. A day may be as full as a hundred years. I see that all right. We've lived in a fashion that few men and women have lived, and none bettered. . . . The more or less don't matter : you can only have it full and overflowing. . . . Everything—everything dead right, and no child coming to put her in a stew nor nothing. All good luck in its way—eh? And you must tell her from me what I tell her in this here letter : to live, if ever she loved me—to live, firstly to clear this innocent, valuable man, because that's her duty so to do, and then for the memory of me, and for you. No need to tell her more than that. The rest will work out all right. Her good time's coming—and yet I won't say that neither. She'll never do better than she did along with me. Not for fire and heat and joyousness. But when she's older, then she may stumble on peace and quiet. She'll come to you—you must make her do that. And Dury will be hers. Tell her that. Dammy, 'tis hard to fling all this on your poor old back ! but there's none else alive but you that would bring Drusilla through. . . . Tell her my last word and prayer to her is, 'Live for love o' John.' She never will forget me. And nature's her side, and she'll live for herself again presently, when the loss be over and the wound healed up. . . . And you, you wise old bird ! You understand, don't you? You know that needs must when life drives and we break loose like I did and run up against justice. I never told 'e because I wanted to spare 'e the haunting thought, and knew that I'd never make 'e feel so careless to it and indifferent as I did. But I'd have told 'e and spared 'e this gashly shock if I'd looked forward and seen as it had to come out."

Jacob was sitting staring with one hand hooked over his deaf ear and his lips working. His face had gone very grey and he breathed deeply. He stared at Redstone, and horror lent a light to his aged eyes.

"I'm cruel sorry for you, grandfather—sorrier far than for myself. There's the letter. Put it in your pocket very careful. She'll know afore you get to her. She'll know when she hears that Timothy be sentenced. She'll guess then. I spared her the pang of good-byes and all that.

I've lied of late—to ease her and let her get her sleep of nights. It's been a pretty rough time for her. You must rise to it, old chap. You believe a lot of fine things, I know, and doubtless if they be worth powder and shot, they'll stick to you and see you through this pinch. I've got to be selfish; but you must forgive me that and everything. . . . Good-bye, grandfather, you've been father and grandfather both to me—and mother too a'most. And 'tis poor payment, but it can't be helped, that I can see. You know I'd have saved you this if I could."

"O Johnny, my Johnny—a beautiful, strong creature like you!" cried the old man.

"Don't touch that. That's done. That's nought. I can't be bothered with trifles no more. I'm long past all that. There's a thing got to be done—a nasty thing—but you know how I took my physic when I was a little boy chap—dashed at it and let it down, and got it over."

"But God—think of God, Johnny!"

"Let Him think o' me. He'll do to others as He'd be done by, no doubt. I know that now. I don't fear Him: I trust Him. You get Campion to see you to Yarner, presently—and bide there for a bit. Then bring Dru along here. She'll have had her fill of Yarner by that time and be in tune for this place."

"You mustn't do it—you shan't, John! I'll fight you for it!"

"No hurry—take your arms away, grandfather. We'll have a lot of talk yet. If you can convince me—why, you shall. I know what a wise old man you are—far, far wiser than me. We'll talk—there's no hurry at all."

He calmed Jacob down and lied to him; and in his heart he reflected how this departure was hedged all round with falsehoods that it might be more decent. None would regard his necessity with sympathy, or take eternal leave of him in the spirit of reserve and self-control proper to such a parting.

He soothed the old man, expressed his willingness to hear him presently, after they had eaten their dinner, and hoodwinked him into a belief that it might be possible yet to change his purpose. Then he went out to find

Campion, and left his grandfather in the house. Campion, however, returned a moment later. He had missed the keeper.

"What's amiss?" said Seth. "You look cruel down in the mouth. My news have tormented 'e. 'Tis terrible enough, without a doubt, but you had to hear it."

The other had become very weak, and trembled on his legs.

"Ess fay, Seth Campion. I be a good deal shaken one way and another. I'm old, you know. Come in the kitchen. Johnny have just gone to look for 'e. There's a loaded fowling-piece over the mantelshelf—good God! what be I saying?"

"You'm shook, for sartin. But put it out of your mind. 'Tis a dark subject for such an ancient man as you be. They pigs have come on something wonnerful. You be pearter with pigs than any of us, in my opinion. Now Leaman, he——"

A gun fired outside the house. There was a great cackle of poultry, and a dog began to bark.

CHAPTER XVII

A FOREST knows no universal slumber for the sleep of the trees is the wakening of many lesser things. Though the grey trunk lifts upward into a suspended animation of branch and twig, yet its surface is mottled with much busy life. The mosses fruit and thrive; the lichens are plump, and stretch forth growing fingers to paint the bole and bough with wafers, discs, washes of ebony and ochre and silver grey. The underwoods sparkle with tufts and cushions of glimmering green, here dark, here emerald bright and shining. Much renewed minor life also wakens from the carpet of the fallen foliage.

The trees indeed sleep, but they also dream. In the heart of every leafless oak a dryad whispers that the days are fleeting; that the icy-footed winter hours are dancing with the snow wreaths away in their chill processions; that the fountains of the sap will soon rise again to Spring's unsealing; that swiftly will the bud-sheath swell and pale and shimmer silky down, like a cast-off veil at the feet of the vernal beeches.

Drusilla Redstone and Timothy Snow walked side by side, and ascended through Yarner in a noon of winter sunshine. She wore black, and upon his left arm, between the elbow and the shoulder, was a mourning band.

The woman had changed and grown thinner. The man looked grey, worn, and distressed. Both were aged appreciably during the last few months. Since John Redstone's end and Snow's subsequent liberation, Timothy and Drusilla had come together but once, and that for a moment only. Now they met by appointment, and spoke about material things.

Snow declared how he and his mother designed to leave Ilsington, relinquish local interests and sell his property. For Sibella Snow was dead. Nothing remained to arrest man's departure, and his desire was to leave England for ever. They spoke to one another lifelessly, but her indifference was the greater.

"Grandfather is a very ancient man, and this have made him much older. He'll grow toothish and silly soon. A sacred trust he is from my husband to me, and I'll pay him what I can for all he did for me—old Jacob, I mean. 'Twas he that first came to me about it, and broke it, and shared it with me as none else could have done. We kept each other alive."

"You'll go to Dury?"

"To-morrow. Dury's my home henceforward. He wanted it so. I'm going to live by work. I've never worked yet in all my life—work is all that's left now. I'm going to work my fingers to the bone."

"Wise enough. And same with me. 'Tis all gone—all the fine ideas and the things I thought I could do—they've all slipped out of my life. I care no more for them. I'll sink down to work and put a stopper on thought."

"You'll come back to thought in time, and lift your head again and want to set the world right."

"No, Drusilla—never again. You'll never understand what all this means to me—with ideas like what I had. I set out to do big things; but I've only suffered them. I meant to make life bend, but it's bent me. I'm old—crumpled up—very near broken. I'm puzzled—to see how the weakness in me let me be drove this way and that."

"Thought came between you and action," she said. "He was different. Once his mind made itself up, it never unmade itself again."

"I know he was like that. I had got the idea what a man ought to be, but he was the man—at any rate much more like the thing than me. I've suffered terrible to find how weak I was, yet I suffered nothing to what you had to suffer. 'Tis an awful confusion and a disaster to be

born at all if you're born to what you were born—or him—or me."

"You're wrong there. He was all right. The day before he died—the minute before—he said to his grandfather that he'd had a fine, full life—and he meant it. I clung to that after. I knew he was going. I knew it in my blood; I saw it in the way he looked at me. But he hid it all he could, and never said 'good-bye.'"

"That was the man. I thought I was as strong as all that—fit and strong to stand anything. But——"

"You needn't belittle yourself," she interrupted. "You are yourself, and you'll do what life lets you and get reconciled to your conscience yet, I daresay. Who can blame you?"

"God knows what I shall do: I don't. My brains have played me false in a sort of way. I'm beat."

"You're cowed like I was—not beat. You've nought to blame yourself with. You was caught up into this. Everybody is weak at some moment, and 'twas just your bad luck that the moment found you weak when you come across the dead man. My husband knew all that, and saw it all amazing clear. He never blamed you. The hard thing was that the truth looked like a lie, and you couldn't make people believe you was innocent. John was very sorry for you—and I am now."

"I'd better have died," he said.

"You know best."

They walked a little way, and she spoke again.

"I go out of this to-morrow. My mind's long shifted to the other place. I used to hate Dury first I went there, and coming from Dartmoor back to Yarner was like coming home, out of the cold world. Now I've run through ten aching, tearing years in as many weeks. I'm an old widow. Everything's changed here—every colour, every sound, every moan of branch rubbing branch to the thrust of the wind. All the virtue's gone out of it. I'd hate it if I had strength to hate; but I haven't got even that. 'Tis no more to me than a picture of old agonies. I forget all the good—'tis so little weighed against the bad."

"You can think and weigh; that's something."

"Oh yes—I can behave in company now. I don't hate and spurn this place any more. I only gaze and see nought, and listen and hear nought. The life's out of it—the death's out of it. What care I for the woe of the woods? I've got my own. What care I for the joy of the woods? Joy's but a ghost from the past for me. I only join hands over work. They work hard, the trees do. They've got their own torments and defeats and failures. They be real creatures, only they know how to keep their counsels better than us. I'll never see another spring among 'em—'twould be unfit. I can't neighbour with spring and bud-break now. I belong to winter for evermore."

They walked upward, and he spoke again.

"The memory of him mustn't be winter—but summer. Memory's thin and pale when 'tis born, because reality is still so close. But 'twill shine out stronger and lovelier for you, Drusilla, as you get further and further away from the past. 'Twill take you out of your winter in fulness of years. He was a brave man, and did a brave thing—how brave I, that loved you, only know."

The eyes were cold and grudging with which she looked at him.

"Yes, he put you before me. He had to do it. There was no bravery—only the cursed, cruel need. I understand everything. I'm not a fool now—whatever I have been. He's no hero, nor nothing like that. There's the bitterness. He's only a man—the dear, wonderful man I loved and put higher than the stars. But not a hero—just an everyday, honest man, that ran his neck into a noose, owing to the blood in his veins and the chances of life playing on him to make that blood too hot."

"If it's ever in my power to do you a service, I'll move mountains for you," he said.

"Mountains are easily moved," she answered. "It's not in your power to do me a service. I've only got a grave to mind and an old man to see go down to his. Easy work for anybody. . . . And you and me—we'll meet no more. We're only thorns to tear each other's wounds, and that's a senseless thing."

"You tear no wound in me."

"Mine you must, and will for ever. 'Tis no time to be speaking less than the truth. We can face truth now—you and me."

They walked a little further, and it seemed that some dull but red-hot instinct of animosity tortured the woman. This meeting had been planned at his desire, and they had entered upon it pensively and temperately. But now her emotion stifled her. She desired to be alone.

Timothy Snow perceived this, and prepared to take his everlasting farewell of her. He exhibited weakness and a lack of self-control. He was broken and agitated. Even his expression had changed; a futile wonder marked it. There had come bewilderment into it; and his voice echoed the doubt. The very lines of his mouth appeared to have been softened—not to benignity but stupidity. He still went dazed. The woman, on the contrary, had risen to a sort of callous power. Snow held out his hand.

"The truth," he said — "an awful thing — a thing as awful as life itself. We've seen it closer than most people—seen it and faced it and gone down under it. The more truth's hidden, the better for the world. That's why Nature hides the truth about herself so close and yields it up so hard. Good-bye, Drusilla. 'Twas a cruel chance that brought us together, and we've knocked one another about pretty bad. I can't say anything—my understanding has gone weak of late. I can't hold on to things and look all round them like I did. Maybe 'twill come back—the power—and maybe it won't. We'll part friends, Drusilla?"

"How you can maunder on mazes me!" she answered. "You—that used to be so certain and clean in your opinions—all clear-cut and sharp-edged. What a blur you be in now! Light and shadow have run into each other, seemingly, with you and made a proper fog upon your mind. 'Tis far ways off that with me. I'm deep in the black, starless night once for all, and I know it. 'Tis dark enough and clear enough. Good-bye. Leave me now; I want to be all alone. I shall never again set foot in Yarner after to-day."

She was looking far beyond him into a glade where

moved memories that concerned another. He still held out his hand, but she did not see it, and he dropped it to his side.

"Good-bye, good-bye—God go with you, if there is a God. And let Him be just for once, and look on you and lift your life up—such as be left of it."

"Let be!" she said. "Wish me nought. 'Twas you hated pity once—now 'tis I."

Then she turned and went away from him. He stood for a few moments and stared around him to decide which way he should leave the wood. He felt resentment at her injustice. His shattered nerves moved him to emotion, but his pride restrained him. He stood, the picture of indecision; then he lifted his head up to the sky, clenched his hands for one moment and drew in his breath. But he soon relaxed; his head came down again and his hands fell to his sides. He crept off, and his mind was smouldering and sulky. He struck about him irritably with his stick, and once he stopped and looked back as though minded to seek the woman again. Her gloomy strength appalled him—he who had been strong and was strong no more. He began to make haste and leave Yarnier. At the edge of it he stood again, looked back and heard distant noises that mingled in his ear. There was a baying hound in the woods and a woman's voice lifted to it; a remote axe tolled like a bell; the wind came through the pines, and a wood-pigeon uttered its broken harmony among them. As the moan of a far-off dirge, deep echoing from the secret places of the forest, those sounds throbbed together; and he listened awhile to them, then went slowly away.

Elsewhere Drusilla, moving with darkness, took her soul amid the patient trees, her tragic spirit through the first punctual observances of another spring. Law reigned as ever around her, where she traversed a microcosm of the wide world; for instability and universal, vital change—sweet as the deep, salt sea—ebbed and flowed about her path. She was part of a becoming that would never become, even as the heart of man is for ever breaking, but broken never. She saw Life wheel

its mazy, myriad patterns once again; she felt Death move beside him—Death the gleaner, gathering the dust that would burn on Life's ever-burning hearth to-morrow. From earth and air and the universal elements was the staple of Yarner still growing. They poured down upon it and maintained it; and out of them there fell a thought that touched the woman's heart with wan comfort, because it brought the dead a little nearer.

For one instant a misty gleam of understanding flashed from the forest upon Drusilla's ken; for a moment reality raised a veil and showed her face, permanent and imperishable, lit by a ray of the truth absolute that homes beyond all haunts of men. And the sad traveller saw reality as a spirit, flying forward for ever and resting upon no solid earth; she perceived that in Winter reality sojourns with Spring, that when Spring is come, she belongs to Summer. For reality can only be felt, not seen, not heard, not verified; she roams far from the substantial, the sure-founded, the proven; she dwells rather with motion and emotion, with anticipation and suspension, with the rising and setting stars, with that purple glory of the distant hills all men have seen, none trodden. She harbours not with darkness but light; a frozen soul is no habitation for her; she wings with the dayspring and the rainbow; she shares the substance of human dreams and inspirations; she is one with the ideals and beacons and golden hopes that reign for ever in mankind's unconquerable heart.

THE END

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